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POCKET NOVELS



Old Ruff, The Trapper.



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BY GUY R. ADAMS

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OLD RUFF, THE TRAPPER;

OR,

THE YOUNG FUR-HUNTERS.

A SEQUEL TO "LITTLE RIFLE."

BY CAPT. "BRUIN" ADAMS,

AUTHOR OF THE FOLLOWING POCKET NOVELS:

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OLD RUFF, THE TRAPPER;

OR,

THE YOUNG FUR-HUNTERS.

CHAPTER I.

"GIVE US YOUR HAND ON THAT."

YOUNG Harry Northend remained by his lonely camp-fire in the wilderness, long after the dull, dismal day had dawned, in the hope that Little Rifle, his promised bride of the wilderness, as he loved to look upon her, would return.*

Now and then he ventured to call to her, although he well knew the risk he incurred in doing so; for he had learned by his previous experience that the dreaded Blackfeet Indians were to be expected at any time, when beyond gun-shot of the fort.

The snow had stopped falling, but it lay to the depth of several inches upon the ground, and seemed to have extended over a wide area of country. He walked round and round the camp several times, searching for the imprint of her delicate moccasin; but the keenest search he could make failed to reveal the slightest trace of her footsteps.

This proved, that whatever might be the cause of her disappearance, it had operated before the fall of the snow—so that, at the least, she had already been absent several hours.

But whither had she gone? What was the cause of her disappearing so suddenly? Had she departed alone and unattended, or was some one else concerned in it?

These were questions which, without exaggeration, it is safe to say, the lad asked himself a hundred times, and which still remained unanswered.

There was but one conjecture that he could make, which seemed to bear the least shadow of reason, and that was that

* See previous issue of this series, "Little Rifle."

she had voluntarily returned to the lodge of her guardian and friend, old Ruff Robsart, the old mountaineer and hunter—not with the intention of remaining there, but with the purpose of consulting with him before taking the all-important step which she had decided to take, in leaving that Oregon wilderness.

“It is no great distance there,” he mused, as he turned this thought over in his mind, “and seeing me asleep in the early part of the evening, she may have thought she could go and return before I would awake; for she can traverse these woods as well in the dark as in the daytime, and she might easily have made such a journey, but I suppose old Robsart has kept her, and I must go there after her.”

Settling down to this conclusion, he decided first to go on to the fort, as he could make the distance in a few hours. He had been absent several days, and his return would set at rest any uneasiness that his friends might feel, and possibly avert the awkward consequences of a search for him by several of the hunters at the post.

Accordingly, when he had made up his mind that it was useless to wait any longer by the camp-fire, he slung his rifle over his shoulder, and started at a brisk walk for his headquarters at Fort Abercrombie, which was safely reached within a couple of hours after.

He found every thing here as when he had left, a few days before, and after partaking of breakfast, and remaining a short time, he started on his return to the lodge of Old Ruff, on the Columbia river, below. On the route, he visited the scene of their encampment in the ravine, the night before, thinking it barely possible that Little Rifle had visited it during her absence, but there were no indications of his having done so, and he resumed his walk in an eastward direction.

Harry set great value by his field telescope, which he constantly bore with him, and whenever he reached a point a little more elevated than usual, he acted like a General who was reconnoitering a hostile territory—making as careful a survey as was possible, in the limited time which his impatience would permit him to use.

Scarcely once did the glass fail to show him the presence of Indians. They seemed to be here, there and everywhere

in this part of Oregon, and the adjoining territory of Washington. Indeed, more than once he paused and scrutinized more closely his immediate surroundings, for it seemed that there must be more still nearer him; but happily he seemed to be free from that danger, and he took care to conceal his trail as much as possible, by using rocks and flinty surfaces, wherever he could turn them to account.

In this fashion he finally reached a ridge, upon which Little Rifle had slain an antelope, on the preceding day. Here he made another survey of the territory, in every direction, wondering all the time whether any of the numerous "signs" which he encountered indicated the presence of Little Rifle; for despite the theory into which he had settled, he could not free himself of the doubt that, after all, he might have failed in his supposition.

This naturally increased his eagerness to hurry forward, and end the suspense as soon as possible; and so, lingering but a short time upon the ridge, he descended the eastern slope, and carefully following the route taken the morning before, being compelled on his way to ford several streams, he succeeded in reaching his destination at last.

It was very near the hour of noon when he did so, and the mild warm sun had completely dissipated the snow that had fallen the previous night. Here and there the leaves were wet, and on the shady side of a rock he occasionally detected a white tuft of the cold feathery snow, but it may be said, that if unaware of the fact, no one would have believed what a fierce flurry had occurred but a few hours before.

As Harry entered the ravine, in which the odd, fantastic home of old Robsart was located, while gathering peltries, he found his heart beating violently and his face flushing, as is the case when one walks forward to hear his doom pronounced by the stern and inflexible judge.

"Suppose she has not returned," he repeated to himself, "what will he say? What will he do? What will I do?"

The next moment the little compact dwelling-house—if such it may be termed—was in sight, and before the entrance he saw the old mountaineer, engaged in cleaning the skins of several animals, preparatory to stretching them out on sticks in the sun to prepare them for packing.

He merely glanced up as he heard him coming, and then, without speaking or making any salutation, continued his work. Harry advanced resolutely forward, and, determined to know the worst at once, said :

“ Good-day, Uncle Ruff. Has Little Rifle returned ? ”

The trapper, seemingly suspecting that something was wrong, suddenly started and looked up with a sharp, inquiring glance. Next moment came his answer, too clear and direct for any mistake :

“ I haven't sot eyes him sense you and him went away yesterday. ”

“ Then Heaven only knows what has become of *her* ! ” exclaimed Harry, in the very wretchedness of despair, as he sat down upon a log and covered his face with his hands. “ She went away in the night, and I can't tell why it was she left. ”

The sharp-eared trapper noticed the peculiar way in which the lad referred to Little Rifle, and, ceasing his work and walking to where he was seated, he demanded :

“ What do you mean, younker, by calling Little Rifle *her* ? What are yer thinking 'bout ? ”

It had not been the intention of Harry Northend to reveal the revelations of last night in this fashion ; indeed he had not settled in his mind that he was going to reveal it at all ; but now, as he had given the all-important hint in his ill-guarded speech, there was nothing left for him to do except to make a clean breast of it.

And this was done. He told the story from beginning to end, even to the declaration of love that he had made to Little Rifle, and her partial confession of the same ; he referred particularly to her tender regard for Uncle Ruff, and her determination to consult him before leaving the wilderness for a civilized life, which declaration caused him to believe that she had absented herself for that purpose. He related, too, their conversation and plans regarding the future, especially the project he had framed of her being taken in charge by his father and educated.

Harry saw from the first that Robsart was to be the main character in rescuing Little Rifle ; that scarcely any thing could be done without his assistance, and so he told the whole truth, keeping back nothing that came into his mind.

And it was a wise thing upon his part. Old Ruff had liked the lad from the first, and his rather annoying *surveillance* of him during the preceding day was merely an attempt to satisfy himself as to whether the lad suspected any thing of the secret of the sex of his *protege*. Such was his course toward any one who was accidentally thrown into their company, and his greater regard for his charge, naturally made him willing to see any one depart after he had spent a little time with them.

But what a tale was it that the lad told him! Here was a clew, or a partial one, to the very mystery which he had vainly sought to unravel for a dozen years.

He had learned her true name—the name of her father—the fact that she had no mother living, and the name of the chief in whose charge she had been placed, and that a few years ago would have been sufficient for him to have learned all, for he knew her earliest protector, Maquesa, the Black-foot, very well, and had encountered him more than once, without suspecting that he ever had any thing to do with the little waif, which was taken from a lodge far up in the country.

“Now, Uncle Ruff,” said Harry, after he had completed the narration, “I have told you every thing I know, and I have come to you for help. How do you feel about it?”

The old, hairy-faced bear-tamer stretched out his broad, horny palm and grasped that of the lad with a warm and almost crushing grip.

“I liked you the fust time I seen you, and you’ve come to me in such a squar’ fashion that I like you more than ever—so give us your hand on it.

“Heaven only knows what has become of Little Rifle—I don’t; but we do know that she is somewhar above ground, and you and me are going to diskiver her—so give us your hand on it.

“I’ve been puzzling my head fur the last six months to try and lay out some course to take with that little pet of mine but it was mighty hard to fix on any thing. As I see’d her growing up without civilized ways, I felt I warn’t doing right, but I kept putting things off, ’cause I didn’t know what I orter to do. Of course it war my place to take her into the

settlements somewhar and give her a fair start: *that* I could see plain enough, but the trouble war that I hadn't any of the sort of acquaintances that I wanted to put her among. You can see she's purty, and she's getting purtier every week, and the fear that haunted me was that if I took her down to Frisco or Sacramento, or some of them other places, she might be ruined, and I'd rather keep her here till she died, than to feel that I'd had any thing to do in bringing about that sort of business.

"But the plan that you've got up, in that smart head of yours, is jist the thing, and Providence put it there! Nothin' on airth could have pleased me more; if the little pet war only here I'd give a war-whoop and dance. We're going to set out to find her, and we're going to find her, and when she's found she's going East with you and your father, and when you both get old enough she's going to be your wife, and I'm going to be your grandmother—no your granddaddy I mean—so give us your hand on it ag'in!"

CHAPTER II.

DOUBT AND PERPLEXITY.

THUS the compact was sealed, and Harry Northend already felt a renewal of hope at this hearty manifestation of confidence in him by the man who was to be the all-important auxiliary in the work of searching out his lost bride of the wilderness.

But he was naturally desirous of hearing from the experienced trapper and mountaineer his theory to account for the mysterious disappearance of Little Rifle, as they both preferred to call her in preference to the new and correct name of Hagar. As yet he had offered no conjecture, and indeed so far as Harry could perceive had not even given it a thought. He now ventured to ask the question.

"*It was the 'arthquake!*" was the astounding reply.

But for the seriousness of the occasion, and the perfect sol-

amness of the bear-tamer's manner, Harry would have taken this as a specimen of his waggery, but it was any thing but that, and the lad stared in blank amazement.

"Don't you know what I mean?" asked the old hunter, observing his wonderment.

"I haven't the remotest idea," was the reply.

"Wal, you know what an 'arthquake is, don't you? I s'pose you've read about 'em, hain't you?"

"Of course I have; every school-boy has read of terrible earthquakes, but what do you mean by saying that the loss of Little Rifle has been caused by such a thing as that?"

"I s'pose you slept so healthy last night that you didn't hear it, nor know nothing 'bout it; but just afore the snow begun fallin', the ground shook; I felt the old lodge of mine rock like a cradle, and I made a dive out-doors so sudden-like that I hit my head ag'in the log thar and split it, so it's almost sp'iled. I knowed the 'arth was off on a waltz, and I done a little dancing, too."

"How strange that I knew nothing of it," exclaimed the awed lad; "I never even suspected such a thing could have happened, although I heard them say something at the fort about an earthquake, and I have heard it said that they have felt a shock once or twice in California, but I hardly thought it could be real. But how, Uncle Ruff, could that have caused Little Rifle to leave?"

"Wal, you see it must have took something extronnery to get her away from you and me—nothin' else would have done it, and I think an 'arthquake is about the most extronnery thing that could have come—so it must have been *that*."

"I can admit all that," returned Harry, as much perplexed as ever, "but still I can not see in what particular way the earthquake caused her to desert us. You don't mean that it caused her death?"

"No; I don't believe it caused the death of *any* one, and I don't know how it affected her; but here the whole thing is: Little Rifle is gone, and it's a mighty strange thing—her going. About as near as we can figure thar's a mighty big 'arthquake that come along 'bout that time—so it's just as plain as the nose on your face that the two are mixed. 'Zactly how it is I don't pretend to say, but we'll go up to

your jumping-ground and cypher round and try and find out."

That looked like "business," and it was a great relief to Harry, who chafed at the delay, feeling that every hour was lessening the chances of discovering the lost one.

There was little cause for tardiness and the old trapper made none. When he had finished the words just given, he threw his long, deadly rifle over his shoulder, and moved with sweeping strides up the ravine, Harry being obliged to keep up a sort of dog-trot to prevent himself from falling in the rear. As he emerged into the more open country he cast a hasty glance around, as if in obedience to an instinctive caution; but nothing of an alarming nature was to be seen.

The lad judged from the manner of old Robsart that he was speculating in his mind as to the probable cause of the disappearance of Little Rifle, and so he did not vex him with questions which he knew he was unable to answer.

"Do you know that's one thing that I think is mighty lucky?" said the trapper, suddenly turning his head toward the lad, and speaking as if the idea had been in his mind for some time.

"I don't know what it is," said the boy, "but I hope it is something big, for we need it."

"I was thinkin' of that 'ere glass of yours. I've seen 'em at the fort and down at Frisco, and of course knowed what they was used for, and yet I was always such a fool that I never knowed enough to bring 'em 'long with me. You can see how mighty handy a telescope would be on the perarie, where you could tell the varmints a long time before they could see you. Hold on to that tight, for I've an idee that it's going to be of some use to us."

"I think there is little danger of my losing it, for you know I carried it over the falls with me, where I lost nearly every thing except that and my life. But, Robsart, didn't I hear you say that you knew this Indian chief, Maquesa, who had charge of Little Rifle in her earlier years?"

"Yes," replied the trapper, "I knowed him several years ago, on the other side of the Cascade Range. I never met him on this side, and that 'ere puzzled me a little. You see when I picked up the little pet, it was on this side the range,

and some distance further north, and it seems that here is whar I orter find the old rip."

"His tribe is on both sides, so that mystery may not be a very deep one after all. But, how is it that he comes to be an acquaintance of yours? Do you class him as a friendly Indian?" asked Harry, naturally enough, deeply interested in any matter that bore any relation to Little Rifle.

"It was rather qu'ar," replied the grizzled old hunter, as he recalled some reminiscence. "I was going down one of the forks of Willamette River, just over the mountain. I was just then hunting bears, and didn't understand 'em as well as I do now. One arternoon I spied a feller full as big as Old Adams' Samson. I seen him come down to the edge of the river and start to swim across, and I put out in a canoe to head him off. I wanted to drive him back among the rocks on the side whar he was leavin', as I had a smash-in' big trap set there, that I thought would hold him—but the critter wouldn't turn, and when I got a little too close with my boat he just give it a slap with his paw, and away it went all to shivers, and me heels over head.

"I wa'n't much afraird of the varmint in the water, as I knowed I could dodge him, but I was thundering mad 'cause I lost my gun, cap and one of my moccasins, and the bear wouldn't turn back for me arter all. So I had to paddle ashore and when I got thar, with nothing but my knife, who should I see pop out from behind the rocks but a Blackfoot. He let drive his tomahawk, just to let me know he was coming, and when I dodged that he came with his knife, leaving his gun somewhar behind him.

"Wal, you can make up your mind that thar was some music about then. We had just the same weapons, and we sailed in, cutting and slashin' each other like a couple of wild-cats. Wal, he war a little the toughest varmint I ever got hold on. We clawed awhile, and then I knocked his knife out of his hand, and dropped mine at the same time. Arter that we kept it up in Yankee Sullivan style, until we both got so tired that we couldn't strike a blow hard enough to make a musketer wink.

"Wal, to make a long story short," added the old fellow, with a grin, "it turned out that me and Maquesa war exactly

even matched. I wasn't a ha'r stronger than him, nor was he a ha'r stronger, and arter we laid back and rested and kept it up fur three full hours, he got upon his feet and said, '*White man is too much fur Maquesa,*' and offered me his hand. That rather took me down, but I shook his paw, and we parted. That sorter made us friends you know, and I've met the old varmint three or four times since, and he always acts as though he thought a mighty heap of me."

"I didn't know as the Indians ever showed such chivalry as that," said Harry; "it sounds like a romance to hear that you met as such bitter enemies, and then parted such friends."

"I've run afoul of him several times, when he had a pack of warriors at his back, and could have raised my ha'r as easy as say so, but he never offered to do any thing of the kind. And now think," continued the bear-tamer, in a voice of inexpressible disgust, "that at that time I war looking up something that could give me a clew to the little pet that I had found, and that I hadn't 'nough sense to ax Maquesa a single word, when he could talk English purty well, and was the very man of all others that could have answered my questions. You see I found the gal on this side the mountains and met him on t'other, and so it never got through my thick skull that that all might be, and so I've gone on ever since without l'arning a single thing, till you come down here and told me."

"Then your first proceeding, I suppose, will be to seek out Maquesa, in case we fail to find any trace of Little Rifie before."

"But hang it!" exclaimed old Robsart, "whar shall I go to find him? I haven't seen him for two, three years, and don't know whether he's alive or dead, or whether he's within ten or five hundred miles, and who shall I ax? It'll just be my luck to go tramping over Californy, Washington and Oregon for the next ten years."

"But can't you inquire of such Indians as you see?"

The old trapper indulged in a hearty laugh.

"One Blackfoot in a thousand can talk English, and you'd have to catch 'em and tie 'em up afore you could get an answer out of 'em."

"Provided she is a captive among the Indians, we have an

almost hopeless task before us," said Harry, somewhat dispirited by the sweeping declaration of the trapper, who instantly added :

"But I don't think she is in the hands of the varmints; we've got a different kind of work to do than that, and here we are close to the place where you camped."

Picking their way through the ravine, they speedily stood upon the very spot where the last glimpse of Little Rifle had been given Harry Northend. Old Ruff paused, and placing his feet upon the dead ashes of the camp-fire, looked with a keen, searching glance about him. He was apparently examining the minutest objects, determined that not the slightest clew should escape his scrutiny.

"Have you found out any thing?" asked Harry, when he saw that he was through.

"Not a blamed thing," was the reply; "stand whar you are for a time, till I take a look at the ground."

This, the young lad supposed was the real test of the whole business, and he watched the actions of the old trapper, with an interest which it would be impossible to describe.

"I find tracks of yourn and hern here," he said, straightening up after a long search, "but that snow has played the mischief. It fell arter she left, so as to hide her trail."

"But it has melted again."

"And that don't help any; its melting has just shet out the prints of her moccasins, so that there is no use in trying to look for 'em. This s'arch has got to be made on general principles."

The general principles of the hunter meant that, without seeking to follow, and find their friend by means of palpable evidence that she had left behind her, it only remained for them to reason out or conjecture, as to the course she had taken, and to pursue that.

He gave it as his belief now that the nearest stream, of size, nad been used by her, and that a portion of her flight had been made upon that.

This meant that the hunt was to be an indefinite one, and like a prudent man, Old Ruff resolved to make his arrangements, so that if necessary, he could continue it for several months. He meant to go into this business to win.

CHAPTER III.

THE REDS.

THE first proceeding of old Robsart was to *cache*—that is bury—his peltries so that they would be safe from molestation from Indians and meddlers, and he could return in his own good time and remove them.

Then he made the round of his traps, and sprung them all, carefully concealing them where they, too, could be found when he should require them, after which he was ready to take up the work.

Having failed entirely in discovering any traces of the means by which Little Rifle had disappeared, the trapper was now disposed to believe that the Blackfeet had had something to do with it, and that his search must be made partly among them.

"You know she is purty cute," he added, "but the smartest man in these parts is likely to run his head in trouble any time, and she may have done it afore she knowed. I s'pose you want to jine me in this excursion?"

Harry, as a matter of course, declared that he did, and the trapper added:

"Wal, we'll work up toward the fort, for you'll have to see the old gentleman, so that if you're gone a month or two, he'll know where you ar', and won't blame me for keepin' away so long."

This was all prudent, and the lad had no wish to make any objection to the arrangement. They shouldered their rifles, and turning their faces toward the Cascade Range, started on what was destined to prove the most memorable venture of their lives.

The old hunter having announced his theory of Little Rifle's disappearance, it behooved them both to maintain as sharp a scrutiny as possible upon the different parties of Blackfeet that were in the neighborhood.

"I can tell you," he muttered, with a compressing of the

lips that attested his earnestness, "if the varmints have got the gal, they've got to keep a mighty close watch on her or she'll give 'em the slip. Let her have a few hundred yards the start, and old Maquesa himself couldn't catch her. She can run like an antelope, and knows how to dodge and double on herself and hide her own trail, so that a bloodhound would give up the hunt in disgust, and go to watchin' sheep for the rest of his life."

"But in this case, it seems to me she would have taken every pains to make her footprints visible, knowing that we would be on the hunt for her."

"How could she know that?" asked the old man, in return; "it ain't likely that she got into trouble till she war a good ways off from camp, and it wouldn't be till then that she would think of such a thing. Yonder is a purty high hill, and we'll climb up to the top of that, and take a look around."

The elevation alluded to was considerably out of their way, lying more to the southward; but, as there was a prospect that it might be of some use to them, they made all haste toward it.

It was very much of the nature of the ridge where Little Rifle and Harry had made their morning meal on the previous day, except that it was higher, and consequently the view was much more extensive.

When at last they reached the top, the boy was charmed with the scenery spread out before him. It was indeed one of the finest views with which he had been favored since coming to the North-west.

Looking to the east, he saw hundreds of square miles of forest, prairie, ravines, gorges and mountain-peaks spread out before him, crossed in every direction by rivers, creeks, torrents, cañons and waterfalls, while the deep emerald tinge of the vegetation, as seen in the spring and early summer, gave a soft splendor to the whole scene that never could have been equaled at any other season of the year.

This view was much the same to the north and south, while in the west it was backed up by that vast snowy range, whose peaks, in many places, were hid from sight among the very clouds.

The same alternation of forest, ravine and prairie encountered the eye in this view, and the soft, mellow haze that enfolded the distant Cascade Range, gave the landscape a peculiarly American appearance, such as rarely meets the eye of the traveler in other parts of the world.

The majestic loneliness of the vast solitude was deepened and made more impressive by the faint view of Fort Abercrombie in the distance. It was many miles away, standing in a small elevated clearing. The stockades by which it was surrounded, and the compact log building itself, resembled some tiny toy, as they were revealed to the eye.

From a tall flag-staff the Stars and Stripes floated in the breeze, and the naked eye was just able to detect the evolutions of the banner as it folded in and out, stretching for an instant to full length, and then flapping about the staff again.

It was a sight to kindle the heart of the patriot, as he looked upon this most beautiful emblem of his country floating to the breeze in this far-away wilderness, proclaiming to all the protection they could find beneath its ægis, and that while they trod this vast domain, it could be with the consciousness that they were still upon the soil of their own dear native land, although perhaps thousands of miles from the spot of their birth.

The feeling of desolation and loneliness which came upon one when he looked for the first time upon this immense landscape of silence was made still greater by the faint signs of the presence of human beings that were here and there discernible. The very insignificance and paucity of their number, as compared with the enormous extent of territory, was what made the contrast the more impressive.

Several miles to the south, a thin blue column of smoke indicated the camp-fire of some party; further to the north, a similar sign showed where another company were gathered, and between and around these two little halting-places for human beings, stretched mile after mile and league after league of unbroken wilderness, in which crouched the bloody minded Blackfoot and the savage bear.

Of some such a nature as this were the emotions of Harry Northend, as he stood on the elevation and permitted his eyes

to wander off in the direction of the great Cascade Range. Young, romantic and imaginative, the grand scene produced a powerful impression upon him, and he stood for several minutes, forgetful of the grief and anxiety of heart that had been his when he made his way to this point. His soul was filled with solemnity and awe, such as come over it in the presence of the Infinite, and at that moment he felt a pride in the thought that this was a portion of his country, and a devout thankfulness that God had thus far protected him from the dangers and perils that threaten all who venture into these wilds.

But if the old mountaineer possessed any poetry in his nature, he had too much on his mind to give any heed to it at present. Perhaps his familiarity with the sublime scenery of the grandest portion of our continent had dulled the edge of his appreciation, or it may be that his mind was so intent on discovering something tangible by which to continue his hunt for Little Rifle, that he had no room for any other thought. But be that as it may, his feelings were very different from those of the lad beside him, as with the field glass in his hand, he carefully roved over the immense expanse of vision, on the look-out for some sign that might tell him something of the loved and lost one.

It was successively turned toward the two camp-fires which we have mentioned, but the survey of neither was very satisfactory. He learned nothing that could afford him any grounds for hope, and he withdrew his attention from them, and pointed the instrument to a broad stream of water that flowed westward and southward, until it was hid among the cañons of the Snowy Range, from which it finally made its way, and continued onward toward the great Pacific.

On every foot of all that sinuous line of the distant water-course had Ruff tramped and trapped; over all these hills had he ranged in his forty years of hill and hunting-life, and, after Little Rifle came to his lodge, often had the blithe, beautiful child been his companion in these deeply-enjoyed wanderings.

Carefully his eye roved along the banks of this stream, wherever they were visible, while the broad silver current did not escape his survey.

Harry, who had recovered in a degree from the awe that had accompanied his first view, now watched the countenance and actions of the old trapper. He remarked his slow, steady shifting of the glass from point to point, until, as his view ranged along the river for a time, it suddenly paused, and he gave a slight start.

The lad took this as an indication that his friend had discovered something, at last, and he was right in his supposition.

Harry carefully avoided speaking, while he saw the trapper thus engaged, knowing that he would make known, in his own good time, whatever discovery might reward his search.

After awhile he handed the glass to the lad, and, pointing toward the point at which he had been directing it, said :

"Take a squint out that way and tell me whether you can't see nothin', or whether you can't see any thing."

Harry gladly did as requested, and, as soon as he had the instrument directed toward the proper point, he saw a party of half a dozen Indians, who appeared to have just effected a landing, as a couple of canoes could be seen lying against the bank. Their motions indicated that they had halted to kindle a fire, most probably for the purpose of preparing a meal.

After watching them a few minutes, the boy stated this to the trapper, who said :

"That's the idee ; you're right ; them canoes show that the varmints are on the travel. Most likely they've come from t'other side the mountains and are going back ag'in."

"Perhaps they're the same ones whose lodges I saw the other day, and from whom I had such a narrow escape."

"Like enough, and it's my opine that they've had something to do with the taking off of little pet."

Harry started and stared at the hunter in amazement.

"Can it be possible ? She is then a prisoner in their hands ?"

"Mind I didn't say *that*," replied Old Ruff, in his cautious fashion, "but there be some things which I can't tell you just now that make me think them varmints are mixed up in

this business, some way or other, and it'll pay to take a look around thar camp, even if we don't l'arn nothin'."

And with characteristic promptness, when he had fully settled in his mind upon the proper course to pursue, old Robsart started off at a rapid walk in the direction of the camp of hostile Blackfeet, determined, no matter at what risk, to learn whether there was any thing to be picked up among these savage foes.

CHAPTER IV.

BETWEEN TWO FIRES.

Two hours from the time of starting, Old Ruff and Harry Northend were within a hundred yards of the Blackfoot camp.

Fortunately for them, they halted in the midst of a dense growth of pines, where they had plenty of opportunity to maneuver and keep themselves invisible.

They were so close to the camp that the voices of the red-skins could be heard, and Harry even caught the smell of burning meat, proving that, as the trapper had said, they had come ashore for the purpose of preparing their meal. Such being the case, they were not likely to remain in camp for a very long time.

Robsart had brought the boy closer to this congregation of red-skins than was prudent, and he expressed regret at doing so, but the young fellow was so brave and eager that it was hard to refuse him such a request. But he was determined that he should not advance another step.

"Stay right here where you are," he added, in an impressive whisper, "and keep mighty shady."

It may be supposed that the lad scarcely needed these instructions, as his own sense would have taught him their importance.

Although he felt equal to the task of reconnoitering the camp himself, yet he dare not propose such a wild scheme to

the old hunter, whose especial province it was to attend to such perilous enterprises himself.

Leaving the latter to carry out the dangerous reconnoissance upon which he had started, we must take the space to describe the strange adventure that befell the lad, who, it would seem, was placed in much the lesser peril.

His situation was interesting and exciting from its proximity to camp, as he could hear the jingle and mumble and guttural hum of the Blackfeet, as they gathered around the fire, eating and smoking in the very *abandon* of enjoyment.

"I don't think there is much chance of Little Rifle being there," mused Harry, when he found himself alone. "If she were among them we would have seen something of her with the telescope, but Old Ruff sees a chance or he wouldn't have undertaken it."

It was comparatively an easy matter for Harry to content himself for a short time, lying down among the bushes, listening to the noise of the red-skins; but, when a half-hour had passed, and the noise decreased, and he saw nothing of old Robsart, he began to feel impatient. He could not understand why it was that the old hunter should remain away so long, when he seemed to accomplish nothing thereby. It seemed to him that the red-skins had all gone asleep or taken their departure, and he and his friend were wasting valuable time.

But the half-hour was doubled and trebled, and then the lad made the exceedingly imprudent resolution to steal a little ways toward the camp—just far enough to get the slightest glimpse, and find out for himself the meaning of this strange silence and delay. He deemed it necessary only to crawl forward a short distance, confident that he could detect the presence of danger in time to withdraw, if indeed there was any possibility of encountering any such thing.

It was with some twitchings and misgivings that Harry began creeping forward, knowing that it was in direct violation of the commands of the old hunter, who would not be apt to look lightly upon such an offense should he discover it.

This caused him to hesitate a few minutes, but hearing and seeing nothing more, he began stealing forward on his hands and knees, advancing inch by inch, frequently pausing and

listening, and peering round in the undergrowth, so as to guard against any danger stealing upon him from any direction.

Two or three times he was on the eve of retreating, and he looked furtively back over the course he had come—but the continued silence, and his impatience prevented, and he pressed on, until he judged that he had passed fully one-half the distance that intervened between him and his starting-point.

Thus far he had carried his rifle with him, and it had proved no little impediment, besides incurring the constant danger of being discharged from the hammer catching in some of the bushes and undergrowth.

The lad had now reached a point perilously near the Black-foot camp, and although he could no longer hear any sounds of the savages, he felt that a dozen feet further must reveal them to him, and in all probability solve the question as to the delay of Robsart.

“I will lay my gun down,” he reflected, “so that I can crawl a few steps further, in perfect quiet, and with that much less risk of being discovered.”

Harry was not the simpleton to separate himself voluntarily from his weapon, when he believed there was the remotest possibility of his needing it, nor, were the circumstances all in his favor, would he leave it beyond his reach.

But, it will be remembered that it was a heavy gun, and that it seriously interfered with his progress; so he laid it carefully down, pointing the muzzle a little to the right, so that, in case of accident, no harm could come to him.

Satisfied, then, that he had done no imprudent thing, he resumed his progress upon his hands and knees, moving slowly, cautiously and stealthily, eyes and ears on the alert for the slightest indication of danger.

All was still—nothing being heard but the soft flow of the river, and softly drawing the undergrowth aside, he crept onward, until he was fully a dozen feet from where his gun lay.

Still he was unable to catch the coveted glimpse of the camp, and he paused, thinking that there was already too great a distance between him and his weapon, and resolved to return and bring it back and place it nearer to him.

But the path which he had made in his panther-like progress was clear and open, and he could dart backward in an instant and seize it ; and so, hesitating but a few seconds, he resumed his advance, with the determination that, at the most, he should not go more than a yard further—just enough to pass through an unusually matted mass of vegetation, that feebly barred in his progress.

One step further, and both hands sunk into a cavity in the ground, a couple of feet in depth—so suddenly and unexpectedly that he pitched head-foremost, making a terrible breaking and threshing of the shrubbery.

Harry was not hurt in the least, but he was almost paralyzed with terror ; for he was certain that the whole camp must be alarmed, and the Blackfeet would be swarming around his head before he could rise or make any attempt to retreat.

He did not seek to do so, but lay still, listening with a throbbing heart, and conjuring all manner of dreadful consequences that were sure to follow this mishap upon his part. As a matter of course he lamented his rashness, with the most bitter feelings, but it was all useless now, and he lay still, with a grim resolve to take the punishment unflinchingly.

A few seconds only had passed, when he heard footsteps, but to his surprise, instead of being in front, they were in the rear. Some one was approaching from that direction !

Like a flash he thought of his gun, and of the supremely silly thing he had done in placing it beyond his reach. As he was about to scramble forth in an attempt to reach it before his enemy, it occurred to him that it might be Old Ruff, who was searching for him. He would have preferred almost to have seen a Blackfoot, rather than be caught in this dilemma by the trapper, for the latter, discovering his foolhardiness this early in the business, would be certain to lose all patience with him, and send him on to the fort, while he continued the hunt alone.

The poor lad was in a sad predicament, not daring to move from where he was, in either direction ; for to retreat would only bring him face to face with the Blackfoot, if such he were, and to advance would be to throw himself into the hands of the whole party.

"And if he catches me here," he reflected, in the intensity of his chagrin, "he will find me without any weapon except the knife and telescope," and he added, with something of his natural drollery, "there is no need of my looking through the glass to bring the danger any nearer, or to make it appear any bigger; for it is too near and too big already."

The extreme slowness of the party approaching him satisfied Harry that it must be an Indian scout, who may have been on the look-out for just such interlopers as he.

At the same time he thought the red-skin was making an unusual racket, for such a proceeding. He could hear the motion of the feet—soft and heavy—and the bending and breaking of the shrubbery beneath his passage, as though he was taking no pains to hide his approach.

"What's the use of it?" he reflected; "he knows he's got a sure thing of it."

By this time he gave up all hope or fear of its being old Robsart, and was certain that it was one of the dreaded Indians, who, knowing that there was no escape for the lad, was toying and trifling with him, as a cat toys with a mouse before devouring it.

In the intensity of his fear in this direction, Harry forgot all about the camp in front, and had no time to wonder at the continued silence in that direction, a circumstance which would have struck him as very strange, under the circumstances.

The crackling and treading of the undergrowth continued, and the suspense soon became greater than the actual coming of the danger itself would be.

"As I don't see any way out of the scrape," he thought, "I may as well end it one way or the other, and so I will meet it."

He had a faint hope, too, that by stealing along on the ground, he might secure his rifle in time to make a fight for his life.

Accordingly he started with the same care and caution that had marked his approach to the camp.

A half-dozen feet were passed in this manner, and then he paused, stupefied with wonder, amazement and absolute terror!

For of all the strange sights and experiences that he had encountered in this country, of all that had been his during his past life, he never had seen any thing that could compare with that which now greeted his vision!

CHAPTER V.

A WONDERFUL ANIMAL.

As Harry Northend crept out from beneath the matted undergrowth, that surrounded the Blackfoot camp, and came in view of his rifle, where he had left it lying upon the ground, he saw not Old Ruff Robsart, nor a repulsive Indian, but a grizzly bear.

And not such a bear as naturalists and hunters tell us about, of a black or tawny color, but something *sui generis*—something such as he was sure no mortal had ever heard of before, or was ever to hear of again.

For, instead of being of the midnight hue that universally characterizes his species, this one was striped with green and blue and red from head to tail!

As soon as the lad had recovered in a degree his self-possession, he rubbed his eyes and looked again, doubting whether he had seen aright.

Yes; there was no mistake about it. There was the creature, the conformation of his head and body proving that he was a genuine grizzly bear beyond all question, and the only remarkable thing about him was his color, and that surely was remarkable enough.

"I have heard of men seeing such things as that," he mused, as, crouching on his hands and knees, he riveted his eyes upon it, "but it was always when they were drunk, and I am sure I have never been in that condition, and never shall be."

The bear was of rather large size, but not unusually so, but the lad judged from his appearance that he was very fierce and savage, and, in his way, was probably as dangerous as a half-dozen red-skins.

His alarm would have been somewhat less had the position of the creature been such as to afford him a hope of securing his gun; but, as matters stood, that was clearly out of the question.

For the mottled grizzly was snuffing and clawing the weapon, as if he had some curiosity to find out its use.

"I wonder whetuer he thinks he knows how to use it," muttered Harry, as he slowly sunk down upon his face, in the hope of escaping his eye. "If he did know how to handle a rifle, I couldn't be more astonished than I am at the color of his coat. He *does* act as if he understood what it is for."

The bear poked the barrel and stock around with his nose, then rattled his long claws over it, as though he was not exactly satisfied with its appearance. When Harry saw that it lay so that the muzzle pointed directly at him, he concluded that the danger was getting too serious and complicated for him to remain idle.

Indians between him and the river, a grizzly bear before his face, and a loaded rifle pointed straight at his head, with very strong chances of its being discharged by the clumsy clawing and scratching of the brute.

"I think I'll back a little nearer the camp," he concluded, "for if I can get down in that hollow again, the bullet will pass over my head, and the monster may miss seeing me altogether, until I can get further ont the way, if that nose of his don't scent me out, or if his brains don't tell him that when he comes upon a gun like that, in these parts, the owner isn't apt to be far off."

But the movement made by Harry caught the ear of the bear, who raised his head as quick as a flash, and, catching sight of him, he "went for him."

The boy was only fairly ensconced in the cavity alluded to, and had turned to see whether he could maintain his invisibility, when he saw the frightful monster almost upon him.

In the presence of this threatened immediate death, it was natural that the boy should run into the other danger, and with a howl of terror, he sprung up from the ground and struck straight for the Blackfoot camp, preferring in the

flurry of the moment to run into their embrace than to remain and take a hug from the bear.

Only a few leaps, and he landed directly in the open space, where the red-skins, a short time before, had partaken of their meal.

But, not one was to be seen. The fire was still burning, but all had departed.

Harry paused a single instant, looking about with an inquiring stare, and then, hearing the bear directly behind him, he made a dash forward, and catching up one of the sticks that was still burning, he circled it swiftly over his head, fanning it into a blaze, and with this potent weapon he turned about to face his foe.

It was a fortunate thought in the young man, for the bravest wild animal can never screw up his courage to the point of advancing straight upon fire; but for all that such a precaution was unnecessary.

Harry had scarcely placed himself upon the defensive, when he heard something very much like a laugh, immediately behind him; but he did not dare turn his head in the presence of this horrible creature.

The bear instead of halting before the blazing brand, seemed to be on the point of advancing straight upon the boy, when the latter, holding the flaming brand before him, turned the tables, by moving directly toward him.

This checked the bear, and at the same instant that familiar laugh struck upon the ear of Harry, followed by the words:

"Throw down yer candle! He won't hurt you! Ain't he a booty?"

That was the voice of Old Ruff Robsart and no mistake. The boy hardly dared to turn his head to see, but the trapper made it unnecessary, by walking forward and placing himself directly beside him.

As he did so, he reached out, and taking the torch from his hand flung it away, and then gave out a peculiar whistle.

Instantly the bear came forward, lumbering awkwardly, but with many indications of pleasure at the sound of the hunter's voice, who continued addressing him by pet names until he was within reach, when he patted him familiarly

upon his head, and at another signal or command, the mottled phenomenon rose upon its haunches, moving its fore-legs like the flippers of a turtle, while its large hazel eyes were fixed upon Old Ruff, with an expression almost human in its intelligence.

By this time Harry Northend had gotten the suspicion that the trapper and this speckled wonder were old acquaintances. They surely met as such, and their conduct continued to give color to the suspicion.

"Bless your old heart!" exclaimed the trapper, advancing and throwing his arms about the hairy neck of the bear, "next to my little pet, I'd rather meet you than any other critter that tramps the woods. You look as though you'd got along purty well sence I gave you a leave of absence, last fall."

While the two old friends were engaged in their fraternal demonstrations, Harry concluded to slip around and secure his gun. That would be only prudent, while he had great fear that old Robsart would discover his inexcusably defenseless condition.

He saw that strange and unnatural as the animal looked, there was nothing to be feared from it, and he passed within arm's length of it, into the wood from which it had emerged but a few minutes before, and a few steps brought him to his gun, lying unharmed upon the ground.

Hastily catching this up, he lost no time in rejoining the two friends—human and brute—that were fraternizing upon the deserted camp-ground.

"Where in the name of the Seven Wonders did that creature come from?" he asked, as he saw the old hunter leaning on his rifle contemplating what was evidently a great pet. The face of the trapper was expanded with a fearful grin, while he occasionally shook in a way that showed he was stirred by mirth.

"That 'ere critter is what I call Speckled Beauty! I cotched him five years ago, when he war a little cub. He al-lers had a good temper, and I fotched him up and made him one of the best-tamed critters I ever saw. Old Griz' Adams never had a neater critter, and Little Rifle—why she and that b'ar war great cronies, I tell you."

"But that color!" exclaimed Harry, "surely that is not natural! If it is, he is worth a very fortune to you!"

"No, in course not; hair don't grow green and blue even on a grizzly bear. I had that critter so well-tamed that he was just like a dog. He used to go off on a hunt for three or four days at a time, but was always sure to come back ag'in. He wa'n't of much use to me, and so I let him go and come as he chose, and when I hadn't nothin' better to do, I used to wrastle and tumble with him and teach him tricks."

"But, I am anxious to hear how he gained such a coat as that?"

Old Ruff laughed as he replied:

"Last summer I was in at the fort, to take 'em some antelope-meat, that I had promised, when one of these long-nosed, genuine Yankees come in. He was on the look-out for something to make money of, no matter what it was, and when he see'd my b'ar prancing around, he proposed that we should go into partnership, and show him around through the States; but I told him one b'ar wasn't enough to travel on, and then he said that he'd fix him. He had a lot of dyes and paints with him that he said he had got up on a patent of his own, and was going to sell to the Injins, and he painted up the b'ar in high style. The dye was the genuine stuff, for though the b'ar was as black as jet it took hold, and made him a purtier color than you see him now, 'cause you know he has shed a good deal of his coat sence then.

"The idee of this chap was to take him round the country showing him off as a phenomenon, but I see'd that he thought it was such a big spec' that he wanted to have the whole job in his own hands—so I told him to take him and go.

"He promised to send me half his profits, but I knowed that if he got away with the b'ar I'd never see either of 'em ag'in.

"But, I reckon he didn't get fur away, fur the next day the Speckled Beauty come back lookin' fur me and Little Rifle. He had the seat of the Yankee's trowsers in his mouth, and so I made up my mind that they'd had a falling out. I left the fort that day, but I l'arned that the Yankee come in the next day to get a new seat to his breeches, and left for Frisco, swearin' thar wa'n't any chance for an honest man to

make a living in these parts. Since that time, Speckled Beauty has been trampin' the woods as he pleases, but he seems to have got weaned away. I s'pose 'cause he's come arter us so often, without findin' me or Little Pet at home."

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT THE TELESCOPE REVEALED.

ALL this was very entertaining, especially when "Speckled Beauty," the hero of the tale, was before the listener, prancing and cavorting, as though he appreciated the compliments of the old mountaineer, but Harry could not forget the fact that their errand was to discover Little Rifle, of whose fate as yet they had not gained the slightest inkling.

"But, Uncle Ruff, what of *her*? Have you no good news to tell me?"

He sobered on the instant the question was asked, and shook his head.

"I'm afeard not. You see I had an idee that Maquesa was at the head of this party, and, as soon as I got in good range of 'em, I laid down and watched. I counted 'em over a half-dozen times, and found thar war just eight. But the old codger wasn't among 'em. To make sarten, I waited in the bushes till they all got aboard and shoved off, thinkin' p'raps Maquesa was somewhar out of sight; but he warn't, and then I started to hunt you up, and found you and Speckled Beauty, waltzin' 'round the camp-ground."

"Suppose you had seen the Blackfoot chief," inquired Harry, "suppose you had discovered that he was at the head of this little party, what clew would that have given you? What would such a fact have told you about Little Rifle?"

"I had an idee that if I seen him, I'd see the gal too. If them varmints hadn't looked so mighty ugly, I'd gone in among 'em, and axed about the health of Maquesa, and l'arned whether he'd been seen in these parts lately, but it didn't look as though thar war much show fur me. Still I believe that

that varmint is at the bottom of this business, and the first thing I'm going to larn is whether he's been seen in this neighborhood. If he has he's the roo-ter we're going fur."

"Uncle Ruff," said Harry, as a bright idea struck him, "isn't there some way in which we can turn this bear to account? It seems to me that such a strange, wonderful-looking animal would scare any Indian out of his wits."

"That's what I've used him fur," replied the bear-tamer. "These Blackfeet don't know much about hair-dye and such stuff, though they can paint up their faces, and when they see Speckled Beauty they're apt to think he's something of a spirit. Ef he'll only scare *them* as much as he does these younkens that go snoopin' 'round Injin camps, they'll never git over it, as long as they live."

Harry could but "acknowledge the corn," pleading as an excuse that any one unacquainted with Speckled Beauty could not look upon him without agitation.

Old Ruff then announced his intention of continuing the pursuit of these red skins toward the Cascade Range, as he had strong reason to suspect that they would be joined by Maquesa before they advanced much further.

Harry was unable to understand what his reasons were for this persistent belief, but he knew he was too clear-headed to follow any phantom, and that there was good cause to expect tangible results from such a course.

But, there remained the trifling difficulty already alluded to. This course was taking them further and further away from the fort, and the old hunter could not consent that the lad should accompany him, until he had received the permission of his father.

This necessitated quite a *detour*, and the loss of much valuable time; but happily this necessity was averted by the unexpected appearance of Mr. Northend himself.

While the two were talking, they heard voices, and the next moment three men emerged to view. All were mounted upon horses, and one was a hunter and guide well known to old Robsart, who instantly went forward to greet him, while Harry hurried up to salute his parent.

Considerable time was passed before a full understanding all round was reached. Mr Northend, under the guidance of

Matt Muggs, a noted scout, was making a sort of tour with a friend through this part of Oregon, in the interests of the Missouri Fur Company, and was now on his way back to Fort Abercrombie, with the intention of soon leaving there for home by way of San Francisco.

It required considerable persuasion before he would give his consent for his son to go off on what he termed this 'wild-goose expedition,' but he finally gave in, and, after some further exchange of friendly converse, and the acceptance of quite a sum of money upon the part of the boy, in order to defray all possible expenses, the two parties were about separating to go their respective ways, when old Robsart, noticing that the trio had come by a route that must have given them a view of the river, asked Matt whether he had seen any thing of a party of Blackfeet within the last hour.

"I reckon," was the instant response; "thar's a party of 'em less nor a mile off in thar boats, steerin' straight for the kenyon in the mountains. As they was a-comin' from this way you must have see'd the same skunks, Ruff?"

"So we did," replied the hunter; "them's the coves we're follerin'. Did you count 'em, Matt?"

"Allers does that, when I kin git a fair squint at 'em. They war in two canoes, and thar war just ten of 'em—"

"WHAT?" demanded old Robsart in great excitement, "sure of that, Matt?"

"I reckon I kin count ten, ef I can't count any more, and I ciphered up them skunks twice, as I had an all-fired notion of takin' a crack at one of 'em. Howsumever, you can ax Mr. Farrell, or Northend here, 'cause they seen 'em too."

"Yes," replied the latter gentleman, "I remember distinctly that Matt remarked that there were ten, upon which I counted them and found that he was right. But, why are you so deeply interested in this particular party?" asked Northend, as he reined up his horse.

"'Cause I think that little pet that I'm arter is among 'em, that's all. I don't s'pose you noticed, Matt, if the old chief Maquesa was with 'em?"

"No," answered the hunter, "they war just fur enough off for me to see fairly, and I want thinkin' 'bout nothin' of the kind, or I'd tuk a little closer peep on your account. If you

think the little gal is among 'em you'd better be off with your Speckled Beauty."

The three horsemen paused for some time to watch the curiously colored animal, as it went prancing and lumbering after its master, and when it was out of sight, they resumed their progress toward the fort.

"Just what I thought," exclaimed Old Ruff, in some excitement, as soon as they were alone; "the pet is thar, and she and Maquesa make up the extra two, that Matt spoke about."

"But, where did they join the party?"

"Somewhar further 'long, and I b'lieve now," continued the mountaineer in his emphatic way, "that the whole caboodle of 'em have come over here after Little Rifle. Maquesa has l'arned somethin' that has made him s'pect the gal that was left in his charge is the same one that I've been bringin' up, and he's come over the mountains in s'arch of her."

"All that looks reasonable," replied Harry, "but I haven't heard or thought of any thing yet that can make me understand the course of Little Rifle in the business. *That* is the mystery which passes my comprehension."

A troubled look crossed the face of the hunter, and he stared earnestly in the countenance of the lad for a moment, and then asked in a low voice:

"Shall I tell you what it means?"

"If you can?" replied Harry, intensely eager to hear his explanation.

"Wal, I can—I can see it all; I know more 'bout the pet than you do, and it all come to me why she left you in that style, when you war asleep by the camp-fire."

Harry Northend stared wonderingly at the hunter, as if he doubted his sanity. But the old man was never in clearer mood, and he was in dead earnest. But now, when the very words seemed trembling upon his tongue, he hesitated, as if unwilling to pronounce them. He appeared indeed to control his emotions only by the strongest effort.

Harry waited, wondering what the words would be; but they came not, and the trapper, who had partly paused in his walk, now walked faster, as if seeking to get away from some exceedingly painful recollection.

Under any other circumstances, the lad would have respected this embarrassment upon the part of his friend; but, where Little Rifle was concerned, he was unwilling to do so, and he put the question direct.

"What is it that you were going to say about our lost friend? You have raised my curiosity, and I hope it wasn't merely for the purpose of tantalizing it by a refusal to reveal what it is you know."

Robsart was silent a moment, and then he spoke briefly but with much feeling.

"No; I didn't do it fur that, younker, fur I think too much of you—but I was in too much of a hurry when I spoke; I can't tell you yit; the time will come arter awhile; wait till then; I won't forgit."

There was no refusing such a request as this, much as it distressed Harry to do so. He resolved that he would make no further reference to the matter until the trapper, in his own good time, should see fit to make clear the mysterious references that had escaped his lips.

The great purpose now was to overhaul the Blackfoot party before they got beyond their reach. This seemed easy enough, as they had no cause to fear pursuit, and their quite lengthy halt for dinner looked as if they intended to continue their journey in a very leisurely manner.

True they had their canoes, and if they chose they could easily maintain a speed that would carry them much more swiftly than their pursuers, but they were not likely to do so, for the simple reason, that there was no occasion (at least in their estimation) for such haste, and Maquesa was not a chief who was accustomed to run away from an enemy, even when he was more powerful than he.

And so, making all haste, the two continued down the banks of the river, moving almost due westward, until they struck another elevation which gave them an extended view of the river flowing away before them. And to their delight they saw the two canoes about half a mile distant, paddling along with a tardy deliberation, that showed they thought and cared little for all who might choose to follow them.

In an instant, Old Ruff had Harry's telescope to his eye. In a moment his face lit up and he passed it back again with:

"Take a squint at that front canoe, and tell me what you see."

And the boy looked and saw beyond all mistake, that Little Rifle was sitting in the forward canoe!

CHAPTER VII.

DOWN THE RIVER.

THE vision as told by the field-glass could but inspire both Old Ruff and Harry Northend with the liveliest hope and enthusiasm.

Again and again they looked through the instrument, although the first glance had shown them Little Rifle's identity beyond all question.

Her size and dress, and general appearance, so distinct from that of the Blackfeet by which she was surrounded, made it impossible to mistake her. The trapper was almost equally positive, that the form immediately next to her was that of the chief Maquesa—although in this, his conclusion was hardly based upon what the glass revealed, but upon his own knowledge and previous supposition of the Indian's part in the abduction of the girl.

Passing the telescope back to Harry, the two instantly resumed their pursuit of the canoes, the mottled grizzly following them with the same dog-like fondness and obedience, now and then lumbering out of sight, but never for any length of time.

The hopeful enthusiasm of the two friends was somewhat modified by the fact that the afternoon was almost gone, and the Blackfeet appeared to be paddling with greater speed than they had used heretofore.

Unless they came ashore to encamp for the night, there was indeed little probability of their being overtaken. Old Robsart, who had horses at the fort, was more than once inclined to procure them for use in the pursuit. He would not have hesitated to do so, had the Blackfeet themselves been

mounted, or had he believed there was any prospect of his being permitted to choose his own route.

But his purpose was to keep close upon the trail of Maquesa, in case he should secure it, and this could only be done by traveling afoot or by using a boat.

A good many miles still intervened between where they stood and the mouth of the river, and nothing just now would have been more welcome than a canoe, with which he could not only proceed much faster, but which would also give the legs of himself and Harry a good rest—a desirable thing, so far at least as the latter was concerned.

Believing there was good prospect of finding one, he kept close to the river, on the alert, cautioning the boy to do the same. The latter was afraid that by this means they would become hopelessly separated from the bear, but the old man showed his confidence in the sagacity of the creature, by declaring that he would not permit himself to be lost by such means.

As they came down from their elevated position, they naturally lost sight of the canoes, and Harry could hardly repress his impatience lest they should fail altogether in finding them again; but the trapper, as he moved on with his long, loping strides, seemed as cool and confident of the issue as if he were only making a round of his traps.

The nature of the ground compelled them to leave the river at intervals, but never long enough to make them feel that there was any danger of their passing on beyond the Blackfeet without discovering them.

The sun went down, and twilight told of the coming of darkness, but still, although our friends were close upon the margin of the swiftly flowing stream, nothing was to be seen either of the canoes or of their camp-fire.

Despite the excitement that had kept up the spirits of Harry, it was impossible that he should maintain this gait without growing weary. He felt that he could not maintain it much longer, but still he hurried forward, determined not to give up so long as he could keep his legs, and prevent himself from falling behind his tireless companion.

"Helloa! here it is!" suddenly exclaimed Old Ruff, as he abruptly halted. "Just the thing I've been looking fur all

the arternoon. Now, my boy, you can rest them pegs of yourn, for I know they can't stand this sort of thing much longer."

As he spoke, he stooped down, and lifted from the ground directly before him, one of those small, delicately framed Indian canoes, which are intended to carry but a single person, but which, in case of emergency, are capable of floating a couple.

Glad enough was the boy to ensconce himself in the stern, where, nestling down in as comfortable a position as he could assume, he felt that he could remain a week at least, before he would long to indulge in pedestrianism again.

Robsart flung him the heavy Indian blanket, which he always carried with him when on his travels, and told him to rest while he could, for there was no telling how long the opportunity would be his, and then taking the long, flat paddle in hand, he made ready to turn to the best account the chance that was given him.

Speckled Beauty stood on the edge of the shore as they pushed off, and gave utterance to a whine or rather growl like the mastiff, who is begging his master to take him along. The trapper replied in a language which, if not understood by Harry Northend, seemed to be comprehended by the brute—who instantly began following them down-stream, until he was hid by the intervening gloom.

"He won't give it up so," laughed Old Ruff, "but I'll warrant you when we land, he'll be close by and won't wait long afore showing himself."

The trapper felt the need of haste, and he now used the paddle with all the power and skill of which he was master. The current was quite rapid, the stream being narrow and deep, and the light canoe seemed to speed over the surface like a swallow.

There was a chilliness in the air, and gathering the thick blanket about him, Harry lay back, too tired to sleep, but so utterly used up, that he wished the Blackfeet would keep up their rowing for several hours yet, so that by the time they halted, he would be in a better condition to do something. He was sure that he was useless for the present.

Although the old hunter said little, he understood the con-

dition of the lad, and he hoped very much the same as he did. He let him alone, wishing that he would fall asleep, for he very justly mistrusted his ability to cope with the physical requirements before him.

The sky was clear, and the moon was not likely to rise until later. The trapper continued his powerful sweeps of the paddle, his purpose being to make the distance between himself and the Blackfeet as small as was prudent, when he could slacken his gait, and prolong the pursuit all through the night if necessary.

Fully five miles were passed in this manner, the stream frequently making such short curves that he held up, fearful that he might betray himself to his foes. As yet he had seen and heard nothing of them, when as he rounded a rocky headland, he abruptly paused and listened.

"Do you hear any thing, younker?" he asked, holding the paddle suspended in hand.

There was no answer, even after he had repeated the question.

"Poor chap, he's asleep!" concluded the trapper, "and I'm glad of it. I shan't wake him till I have to. He's full of pluck and nerve, but he ain't used to this business; he's got to get older afore he kin stand it as well as me. I don't know much 'bout such things, but I think he loves that gal, and she feels sorter the same toward him. I don't know what he'd think if I'd tell him why she left his camp the other night. He's got to find it out some time, and I won't distress him by tellin' him until I can't put it off any longer. 'Sh!"

As he listened, he heard faintly but distinctly the sound of paddles. His experienced ear enabled him to tell that two canoes were only a short distance ahead, so there could be no reasonable doubt but that he was close in the rear of the Blackfeet party.

"I wonder ef they're going to keep it up all night?" was the next thought of Old Ruff; "ef they are, I kin paddle as well as them, but then it ain't going to give me much chance to get a word with Little Rifle, and it will sorter bother the brains of Speckled Beauty to keep the hang of things. But he's smart, and has done 'cuter things than that, in his time."

He did not forget to handle his own paddle with all the care possible, for the most awkward consequences might follow a discovery upon the part of Maquesa that some one was following him.

In the still, calm night, sound was conveyed some distance with wonderful distinctness. To the casual ear, the red-skins were no more than a hundred yards distant, but he knew that triple that breadth of water separated them, and he was enabled to judge also the exact speed with which they were progressing.

The trapper had no wish to lessen this space, and he took good care not to do so. His wish was that they would land, and give him a chance to bring things to an issue.

Once he was filled with misgiving, when, as he paused to listen, he was unable to catch the slightest sound of their paddles. He concluded at once that he had betrayed himself, and Maquesa had given the word for his warriors to halt until the pursuer should come up and place himself in their power.

Old Robsart was not the man to do this, and he halted, too, holding his paddle ready to send his boat back again with its arrow-like speed.

"Ef they want a race, I'm ready," he concluded, "and I'll make a present of my scalp to any red-skin kin catch me in a fair canoe-chase."

But it was apparently some other cause that had produced this temporary cessation in their paddling, for the next minute it was resumed with the same regular sweep as before.

The trapper permitted his boat to remain stationary until the distance had been greatly increased, when he resumed his pursuit, with a caution and silence that made it impossible for the trained and listening ear to detect his coming. He appreciated the position too keenly to make any mistake at such a critical time.

He did not speak again, but, lifting the paddle, pushed the shoulder of Harry vigorously; but he was in too sound a slumber to awake.

"Sleep on," muttered Old Ruff, as he cautiously impelled the canoe. "You ain't of any account now, and you're safe till morning any way. If there's any ticklish business to be

done to-night, I'd rather have you asleep than awake. I left you up the river, and gave you orders not to stir; but you couldn't wait till I come back, and ef the varmints hadn't left jist when they did, you'd had us both in the ugliest scrape of our lives. I'll pay him for that, yet," added Old Ruff, with a shake of his head; "when I take younkers to train, they've got to obey orders. Ah! what does that mean?"

The Blackfeet ahead had ceased paddling again. Certain that they had heard nothing of him, old Robsart was naturally curious to know the cause, and he ceased, too, permitting his canoe to float with the current.

For several seconds every thing remained as silent as the tomb, and then he detected a sound which he understood too well.

"Good!" he growled, with a grin of delight. "The varmints have landed to go into camp, and now the fun will begin!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"SPECKLED BEAUTY" IN CAMP.

THE old hunter kept his canoe motionless in the current until he was certain that every one of the Blackfeet had left their boats, and had pulled them up on the shore, beyond danger of being swept away by the current.

Even then he waited until no doubt could remain of their intention to kindle a fire and to make a prolonged halt. As soon as he caught the first twinkle of their camp-fire, he shot his boat swiftly to the bank, and stepping softly out, drew the prow clean up out of the water, beneath some overhanging bushes, where it could not be seen by any one who might accidentally pass near.

Not the slightest movement indicated that there was any danger of awakening on the part of the lad, and confident that there was not, he only paused long enough to gather the bushes a little more compactly about the boat, so as to make the concealment as perfect as possible.

Old Ruff then, with rifle in hand, straightened up and looked off in the darkness, turning his gaze up instead of down the river.

"I don't hear any thing of Speckled Beauty," he mused; "but I s'pose I've traveled a little too fast in the darkness for him to keep track of us all the way; but he'll be along arter awhile."

With this confident conclusion, he moved off in the direction of the camp-fire, which was now burning brightly and cheerily, and the bustle and activity of the red-skins about the blaze made the scene interesting if not cheerful to the ordinary looker-on.

It was an easy matter for the trapper to reconnoiter the camp of a foe at night, and he moved leisurely along until he reached a point from which he was afforded the best view possible of the congregated Blackfeet.

The latter had brought a haunch of venison with them, which was being cooked over the fire, most of the Indians moving hither and thither, while one or two were lazily stretched out upon the ground, smoking their pipes.

Upon a fallen tree, near the blaze, sat Little Rifle. Her head was bent, and an Indian blanket was gathered about her, so that her face could not be seen by the trapper, although he stood directly in front of her.

But it needed not the sight of the beautiful little weapon lying at her feet, for the old man to identify her. If he was enabled to do so when half a mile distant, there was no mistaking now, when no more than a hundred feet separated.

After watching her intently for a minute or two, in the hope that she would raise her eyes, the trapper turned his gaze upon Maquesa, who, lounging at her feet, was looking up in her face and talking. Old Ruff could catch the mumble of his voice now and then, when there was a lull in the racket made by the others, and he could see from his manner that he was deeply in earnest about something, though unable to catch a syllable that he uttered.

"I think I know what that means," growled the hunter, as he fairly glared upon the red-skin. "I was afeard of it. Ef it hadn't been fur that desprit fight that me and Maquesa had, and the consequent love atween us, I'd put a bullet spang

through him, from whar I stand, though I s'pose the red-skin does mean well enough—"

At this moment the watcher heard a crackling off to the right, and turning his head, he saw, to his dismay, Speckled Beauty, the gorgeous grizzly bear, emerge from the gloom, and without a moment's hesitation, walk directly toward the camp fire.

Robsart would have prevented this had it been possible; but he had forgotten all about the animal for the time, and he could not have signaled to him, or crossed his path, without betraying himself to the group of savages. So, with no little chagrin, he stood where he was and watched the antics of his pet.

Speckled Beauty, coming to the camp-fire under the impression that it was kindled by his friends, and desecrating Little Rifle, had turned his steps toward her, as the best he could do under the circumstances.

The moment he came within the circle of light, there was a furious uproar, and nearly every red-skin sprung for his rifle. Maquesa leaped to his feet, greatly startled by this tumult; but before any one could discharge their pieces, he recognized the brute and forbade them firing.

Little Rifle also raised her head for an instant, looked steadily at the bear, and then, without changing her position, looked down again, drawing the blanket about her shoulders, and seemingly indifferent to what was going on about her.

The tumult and confusion created by the Blackfeet alarmed Speckled Beauty, and caused him to pause in his walk toward the girl. He glared at the red-skins, and then apparently scenting danger in the sight of so many guns, turned squarely about and lumbered off in the darkness again.

"He's done all the mischief he can, out thar," growled Old Raff, impatiently, "and now he'll nose around till he finds the Yankee or me, and make every thing ten times worse."

He began to suspect that he had made a blunder in bringing the curiosity along; for Maquesa, knowing to whom he belonged, would be very apt to suspect that his master was somewhere in the neighborhood, and placed thus upon his guard, the labor that Robsart had laid out for himself, would be increased ten-fold.

This was the mischief that undoubtedly had been already committed; but fearful that Harry Northend would also betray his position, when suddenly aroused from his slumber by the snout of the bear, thrust against his face, the trapper cautiously withdrew from his advanced position, and circling around, came to the river-bank, a short distance above where he had left the boat.

He was none too soon, for at the same instant he saw the outlines of the dark, cumbrous body of his pet bear, which gave a growl of pleasure, as he recognized his master, and hurried forward to receive his caress.

It was not withheld, the bulky brute cavorting and tumbling about his master, with the playful affection of a kitten. It took fully a half-hour before he could be quieted down into any thing like tractability, during all of which Harry was sound asleep, and happily unconscious of what was going on so near him.

It was the wish of the bear-tamer to prevent the lad from being awakened, and when he had shown the bear where he was, and permitted him to nose around for a short time, he concluded that the danger was past, and impressing upon the sagacious brute the importance of remaining where he was, he returned to his reconnoissance of the camp.

Here another surprise and a bitter disappointment awaited him. The huge fire was burning as brightly as ever, but not an Indian was to be seen!

As silently as shadows, they had launched their canoes again, and floated away in the gloom of the night!

And so abruptly had all this been done, that Old Ruff had no suspicion until he saw the evidence before his eyes.

"That's it!" he exclaimed, in his anger. "Maquesa is sharp-witted, and if he'd been a fool, he'd knowed what the sign of Speckled Beauty was. He has tramped a good many miles of the woods alone, but I don't s'pose he's been see'd by any one who knows him, that they haven't made up thar minds that I was close by. That's jist what the chief has understood, and he and his varmints has slipped off ag'in."

He stood a moment, fairly gnashing his teeth in his chagrin, and feeling any thing but particularly friendly toward the bear that had been the cause of the mishap.

"Confound him!" he growled, "I wish that that Yankee that dyed him up, had made him die himself or had took him along with him; fur Maquesa isn't goin' to be cotched nappin' ag'in. Howsomever, if rowin's the word, I'm in!"

Roused to action, he strode rapidly back to where the canoe was concealed, and pulling it from its concealment, seated himself in it, and shoved out from shore, paying no heed to Speckled Beauty, who lingered on shore, expecting an affectionate farewell.

Reaching the center of the current, he permitted his boat to float with it for a short time, while he listened.

No sound of paddling reached his ear—naught but the soft flow of the river, and the sighing of the night-wind.

But for all that he knew the Blackfeet were paddling swiftly down the river. They were simply using due caution in the handling of their paddles, so as not to afford *him* the clew that had already guided him so far.

When he resumed the use of the paddle, the impetus of the boat aroused Harry, who, rousing up, looked around for a moment in bewilderment. Then, recalling his situation, he muttered:

"Paddling yet, Uncle Ruff. It was last night, it seems to me, that I went asleep, so that you must have kept it up for twenty-four hours. Don't you feel a little stiff in the joints?"

"I think I would if I had been paddling as long as all that, but I think you're a little ahead of the right number—say an hour or two."

"But what about the Indians? What about Little Rifle? Have you seen nothing of her? Have we lost all trace of Maquesa and his men?"

And then the trapper proceeded to tell, in his characteristic manner, all that had happened since his young friend had closed his eyes in slumber.

As may be supposed, Harry listened with the most absorbing interest. It was aggravating to reflect that they had been thus nigh Little Rifle, without opening any communication, and with the only result of placing matters in a much more favorable light than before; but such was the irresistible fact.

All this time the man was busy at the paddle, occasionally

pausing to tell whether he could catch any sound from those ahead, but failing as yet to do so.

"How easy it would be for them to land," said Harry, in a cautious voice, "and allow us to pass them in the gloom, and so get entirely off the track."

"They could do it, I allow," replied the hunter, "but they won't. Maquesa is aiming for t'other side the mountains, whar his village is, and he won't stop 'g'in, for any time, till he gets thar, as he thinks he's got a sure thing of it."

Notwithstanding the confident tone of the trapper, it began to look as if the supposition made by the lad was correct; for as the night passed, not the slightest sound of paddles in front or rear could be heard. The rising of the moon made the course of the river visible for a greater distance, but the eye roamed along the stream and bank in vain.

All night long old Robsart continued at work with the paddle, passing from side to side, halting, listening and watching, and Harry assisted him to the best of his ability, but it resulted in naught.

CHAPTER IX.

THROUGH THE CASCADE RANGE.

THE scene now changes to the western slope of the Cascade Range.

The spot is hundreds of miles from where we last saw Old Ruff Robsart and Harry Northend. Long days and nights have passed since then, and during that time these two, who have become deeply attached to each other, have followed the river to its kenyon in the mountains, and taking advantage of a pass well known to the trapper, they have safely worked their way through the immense snowy chain, and are now upon the western slope, facing the Pacific.

It was a daring feat for these two to attempt, and many a time and oft they have been in the most imminent peril of their lives. Snow, biting arctic winds, fierce Indians, savage wild beasts and hunger—these were the enemies that man

and boy were compelled to encounter again and again, and only the matchless skill of the great bear-tamer, his coolness and self-possession under all circumstances, his wonderful knowledge of the mountain solitudes and fastnesses, and the superb physical condition of both, enabled them to come forth from this tremendous labyrinth of snow-crowned peaks, roaring kenions, dizzying ravines, gorges and chasms, not merely in as good condition as they entered, but (notably in the case of the lad) stronger, more rugged and better prepared to face the remaining difficulties to be overcome.

Although, as we have stated above, many days have passed since Maquesa and his little party gave them the slip on the river, yet despite the most determined exertions upon the part of the trapper, the trail had never been recovered.

Maquesa was one of the most cunning of a proverbially cunning race, and the lesson taught him by the sudden appearance of the mottled grizzly had not been taught in vain. He knew at once that his old adversary and friend was after him and his charge, and he "sloped" in such a decidedly French style that his pursuer with all his remarkable skill had not again caught sight or sound of him.

Finding that the trail was irrecoverably lost, the trapper gave up the attempt entirely, and believing that Maquesa's ultimate destination was a village upon the other side of the Cascade, he made his way through by the shortest and most expeditious route, intending, if possible, to head him off.

That curiously colored bear seemed to have given up as hopeless the attempt to keep up with the two, as they slowly worked their way through the vast mountain-chain, and he had not been seen since their encampment several nights before in the pass.

Harry was alone in a glen where he had kindled a fire secure from the observation of any and all who did not pass too close. He had learned a great deal since he and his friend had left the river, and there was little danger of his committing the rash mistake that had marked his first essay in hunting a party of Blackfeet Indians.

Old Robsart carefully noted the rapid improvement of the lad, and he had come to trust him far more than he would have done a week before.

Harry was sitting alone with his blanket thrown over his shoulders, for there was a chilliness in the air that seemed to come from the snowy mountains on the east. His rifle was between his knees, and he sat upon a boulder looking down in the embers, thinking and speculating upon the future.

"Here we are on the other side of the mountains from Fort Abercombie," he thought, "and who shall tell whether we are ever to see Little Rifle again. Old Ruff seems to lose no heart, and yet he is silent and thoughtful, and I think he must feel at times as though all hope was about over. He has taken the telescope and gone off to hunt a Blackfoot village. I went yesterday with him to find the village where Maquesa reigned a few years ago; and when we got there, not a sign of a lodge was to be seen."

Such was the fact. Confident of discovering the chief, the trapper in company with the lad had made his way directly to the spot where he and a portion of his people had had their homes for years; but only to find, that, like the Bedouins of the desert, that they had departed—months before—no one could tell, and there was no means of learning, whither.

This was a damper, and for a time he was completely nonplused. But, declaring his belief that the village was somewhere in the neighborhood, he had returned, and from an elevated point, carefully surveyed the vast area that was spread before him toward the Pacific.

Finally he had detected the appearance of an Indian town many miles to the west and south; and, as Harry had been constantly on the watch and tramp for several days, it was arranged that he should go into camp in a secure spot and await the return of the trapper, who expected to put his own powers of endurance to the severest test.

He had no misgivings in doing this, as there were no signs of the immediate presence of Indians, and, as for wild animals, they were to be met with at all times, and he had an abundance of ammunition, with which to defend himself.

Harry was also furnished with enough meat, cooked and prepared, to last several days—it having been their prudent custom, when among the mountains, to guard against any emergency in the way of food, by carrying at all times a supply with them.

The lad had secured a comfortable little nook in which the fire was kindled, and had gathered enough fuel, as he supposed, to last until daylight.

"It is strange," he continued, as he sat gazing absently into the fire, "that Robsart makes no explanation of the reason why Little Rifle deserted me on that night. I shall never ask him again if I never learn; I have puzzled my brains over it a hundred times, but all to no use.

"And now, if he fails to find Maquesa, what is to be done. Among these thousands of miles of wilderness, ten thousand Blackfeet may hide for their lifetime, and no one can find them. But for that mishap of the bear, it might have been ended long ago. Now the chief has been warned of what is afoot, and he is too sharp to be caught—"

He paused suddenly in his meditations, as he heard the sound of something moving near him, and looking up, caught the outlines of some huge dark animal as it moved back out of the range of the fire.

There was nothing particularly alarming in this, as he had become accustomed to such creatures; but, as he sat alone, miles from any friend, in a mournful reverie, it was a rather startling awaking, and he caught up and cocked his rifle, as though he expected a charge from it.

His second thought was that it was "Speckled Beauty," still faithful to his friends; but the action of the brute proved the contrary, as he remained in the background.

Harry caught the phosphorescent glare of his eyes, and heard a deep, guttural growl, which proved that if he belonged to the bear species, he was not the one which had been so well trained by Adams, and so skillfully but unprofitably ornamented by the Yankee speculator.

The young man was somewhat loth to fire his gun, as the trapper had cautioned him never to do so unless compelled, as the report was frequently more dangerous to the one discharging it than the bullet was to the one at whom it was aimed.

But Harry had to choose between the horns of a dilemma. If he did not give the brute his quietus, he would probably prowl around all night and keep him continually on the alert to save his own life. The probabilities, too, were that addi-

tional fuel would be required to keep the fire up to the requisite point, and in the end he would be obliged to kill the creature in self-defense.

"And such being the case," he concluded, after turning the matter over in his mind, "I may as well dispose of my visitor at once."

But the brute, although he was growling and nosing around the camp-fire, as though seeking an unguarded point where he could seize his prey, still remained too much in the background to afford the fair aim that was desirable.

Now and then the glassy glitter of its eyes could be discerned, but they flashed in and out of view before a fair aim could be settled upon, and the boy had no disposition to throw away a shot.

The agility displayed by the beast, as it appeared here and there in the gloom, caused Harry more than once to suspect that it was some other kind of creature than a bear, while its cat-like stealth of movement made him fearful that it would make some sudden, treacherous spring that would take him off his guard.

He sat with his gun at his shoulder, waiting for the coveted chance, when all at once it advanced into full view, and taking a quick aim, he fired.

There was a fearful snarling howl, and the brute made a tremendous bound directly backward in the gloom, that carried him entirely out of sight.

"There! it's my opinion that that pill will have a good effect upon your system," exclaimed Harry, as he proceeded to reload his piece. "I think it struck you somewhere about the head, and will make it ache, to say the least."

He confidently expected to hear it roll over on the ground, clawing and clutching the earth in its death-struggles; but the howl and leap were succeeded by a profound silence.

"He has subsided without making any extra fuss," was his conclusion, as he placed the cap upon the tube of his gun. "That is, perhaps, the plan most to be commended, for he might have rolled over in the fire and burned himself—"

A soft, stealthy movement just then caught the listening ear of Harry, and turning his gaze as quick as thought to the opposite side of the fire, he saw, to his amazement, the beast

that he had just pronounced dead, stealing toward him on its belly.

The sight that met the eye of the young adventurer was enough to startle a man of stronger nerve. The animal was as black as midnight, quite large, with a long neck, and a snout that resembled that of a wolf or fox, only much larger and fiercer. Stretched out, as it stole along in the manner mentioned, it seemed unnaturally prolonged, while the almond-shaped eyes seemed to emit fire, as they were fixed with the most deadly intent upon the one who had already lodged a bullet in its body.

This horrid head and front were covered with blood, that trickled upon the ground, showing that if the shot had not killed, it had certainly inflicted a grievous wound. To what species the animal belonged, it was impossible to say; but most probably it was a cross of some kind, combining in itself the activity and fierceness of the panther, and the treacherous cunning of the wolf.

Whatever it was, it was bent upon the life of the boy, and would have had it in another moment but for its soft, gliding movement over the ground, which providentially revealed its approach before its sharp claws could be buried in his body.

CHAPTER X.

A BRUTE'S SACRIFICE.

THIS sudden and unexpected appearance of the wild beast caused Harry to fire without taking the careful aim that he would have done had the case been different; but he made sure that his rifle was pointed straight at the brute, and that the discharged bullet would be certain to enter his body.

And so it did, but missing the head, buried itself in the flesh somewhere along the back, the result being another serious wound and the maddening of the wild animal to such a degree that he became perfectly frantic in his rage.

Forgetting his habitual cunning and treachery, he rose to

his feet, giving utterance to a savage growl, and with his head lowered, like a bull when about to use his horns, he advanced directly upon the lad.

The latter had no time to reload, and reading the deadly intent of his foe, he ran round to the opposite side of the fire, so as to interpose it between them. The brute, still glaring and growling, trotted after him.

It would not venture through the fire; but as it was more nimble of foot than the lad, he could gain nothing by this course.

Still, as it seemed to be the only thing that he could do, Harry threw down his gun and snatched up his blanket, and made a dash for liberty. His hope lay in the belief that the brute was so badly injured that he would soon become disabled, and that he would not venture as near the blaze as did his intended victim.

Disappointed in both of these respects, Harry made a hasty grab and caught up one of the burning embers of wood, which, as he walked backward, he whirled about his head as a guard to keep the brute away.

This was a partial success, as all animals naturally have a terror of fire, and the one in question fell back growling and glaring, as if deliberating with himself as to the best method of circumventing this obstacle.

He showed no disposition to give up his scheme, but continued stealing forward inch by inch, as a cat is sometimes seen to do when about to leap upon its prey. Harry halted, expecting, of course, it would do the same. For a moment he thought it had, but, as he fixed his eyes upon it, he observed that it was still advancing, almost imperceptibly, but none the less surely, for all that.

"Confound him!" exclaimed Harry, as he became conscious of this insidious movement. "I never heard of such a creature; if he wants a taste of fire, I'll give it to him."

The beast was now less than a dozen feet distant, when the boy took a step toward him and then dashed the blazing brand full in his face, muttering, as he did so:

"There! take that, if you want it."

It was enough to daze and terrify any thing, and the brute, with a howl such as he gave when struck by the first bullet,

recoiled on himself, reared on his hind-legs, and pawed madly as if to fight off the torch, which had struck his black head, and then glanced off in the darkness.

This bewilderment lasted but a second or two, when it moved toward the lad more determinedly than ever. The latter had made a snatch at a brand, but in his hurry it had slipped from his hand after he had risen to his feet, and retreated a step or two.

Before he could recover it, the brute was not only nearer to him than that, but had actually interposed between him and the fire!

Thus in a twinkling, as it were, the lad found that he had been totally disarmed—not only deprived of the use of his gun, through the denial of opportunity to reload it, but he was shut off from his *dernier resort*—the chance of using the fire to fight off the determined advance of his enemy.

Harry had now his blanket thrown over his left arm, and his hunting-knife at his waist; but he knew that if he was forced to a hand-to-hand fight with the furious beast, he would be torn to shreds before he could do any execution with his weapon. His case looked exceedingly desperate, for the snarling animal having intruded himself between him and the fire, was too knowing to permit him to recover his place again.

It was useless to attempt to flee, and Harry Northend stood his ground, looking down with a fascinated gaze upon the horrid-looking brute, as creeping along for a foot or two more, it began gathering its paws beneath its body, to make its leap.

With a courage born almost of despair, he saw all this and never stirred, standing like the bird that is charmed by the rattlesnake, that knows it sees certain death, but has neither the power nor the will to escape.

But it was not entirely thus with the lad. He possessed rare courage and pluck, and had decided his own course of action. It was a desperate resort, but it was all that remained to him, and he held his nerves with a will of iron until the critical moment was upon him.

It came with the next breath. There was a sudden quickening of the legs as they were gathered beneath the belly of the animal, and then it made its fearful leap.

For one instant the dark, panther-shaped body was visible in the air, and then, as Harry saw it descending upon him, he gave the blanket a fling so as to throw it directly over the head of the snarling beast, leaping aside at the same instant, and making another attempt to recover his position by the fire.

He succeeded in doing this, although he fell upon his hands and knees, and before he could scramble to his feet again, the brute had pawed the blanket from his eyes, and glancing around for an instant, discovered where his slippery victim was.

There can be but little doubt of the ultimate result of this strange contest, for every advantage was upon the side of the beast, which gave no evidence of suffering the least exhaustion from the wounds it had received.

But at this critical juncture a third party appeared upon the scene, not in the shape of Old Ruff or an Indian, but in that of another wild brute.

As Harry rose to his feet, torch in hand, and stood confronting his enemy, he heard a growl from his right hand, and concluded that it was all over with him beyond a question, if he was to be called upon to combat two such enemies.

The wounded animal heard the ominous sound, and also turned his head, sending back a defiant growl, as if to warn all outside parties that there was to be no interference here.

The thunderous growl was still rumbling in the throat of the brute when Harry saw a huge dark body pass like an arrow through the air, coming down from the rock over his head, and speeding as straight and truly as if fired from the mouth of a giant columbiad, directly at the defiant beast, which was not given time to prepare for the charge.

The attacking brute landed directly upon the shoulder of the other, and at the same instant the two closed in a deadly, fearful encounter.

With the quickness of lightning the fight assumed the fiercest character, the two wild beasts going at each other with the determination to do or die. Snarling, growling, clawing, scratching, gouging, biting, snapping, tearing and rending, they rolled over and over upon the ground, the hair flying in every direction.

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Harry Northend stood transfixed, for the time, by the terrible scene before him. The fight was of that furious nature which showed that it would never terminate until one or both were dead, and that the consummation was sure to take place very speedily.

And reflecting that whichever party was the victor would be certain to turn upon him, the young hunter was too prudent to throw away the opportunity thus providentially placed in his hands, and he hurriedly caught up his rifle and began reloading it, with the intention of taking a position from which he could watch the fight, and when it should terminate, could lodge a bullet in the brain of the victor and leave himself master of the situation.

The act of loading his weapon naturally drew away his attention from the combatants for the time; but when he had placed the percussion upon the tube, he turned his gaze upon the struggling beasts again.

Just then they rolled closer to the fire than they were before, and were consequently brought into closer view, and as the lad withdrew from beyond their reach, and looked down upon them, he saw, with feelings that may be imagined, that the one making the attack was his old friend and acquaintance, "Speckled Beauty."

One look at his hide, now crimsoned with a deeper dye than the art of the showman could give it, showed this, and the wilom resentment that he had felt for the mishap caused by him, was now turned to gratitude and admiration for the part he was playing in his defense.

"Fight away, my friend!" he exclaimed. "Neither Old Ruff nor I shall ever say or think ill of you again, for you meant well, and but for your coming now, I should have been in your place. Good luck to you, and I will give you what help I can."

His purpose now was to lodge another bullet in the other beast in such a way as to "lay him out," and leave Speckled Beauty the master, for it looked as if he had undertaken a job which he was unable to carry through, his foe showing not only the greatest tenacity of life, but also displaying a strength and activity almost incredible.

The mottled bear possessed enormous strength, but in quick-

ness of movement he was far inferior to his foe, whose long, sharp claws, were tearing and pounding at his vitals with blows like the piston-rod of a steam engine; but the Beauty was game, and he stuck to his antagonist to the last, never intending to give up the fight so long as the strength remained to continue it.

Harry held his rifle cocked for several minutes, waiting and unable to get the chance to fire; for the two rolled over so rapidly—first one under and then on top again, that he was fearful he might wound his friend instead of his enemy.

Leaping back and forth around the two dark bodies, now upon one side and then upon the other, and once or twice narrowly escaping being thrown beneath them, with the blood and hair flying all over his clothes—Harry at last saw his chance.

There was a momentary lull in the fight, the bear was under, and the head of the other was in full view. Quick as thought the muzzle of the rifle was thrust into his ear, and the trigger pulled.

The shot told, and the bullet went crashing and tearing through the skull and brain of the beast, who lay motionless for a moment, and then with a spasmodic quiver rolled over upon the ground without a spark of life in his body.

"My poor, brave friend," said Harry, bending over the grizzly bear, "you have done me a service for which I can never pay you."

He stooped lower and looked more closely at him. The animal never stirred. A groan of anguish escaped him, and it was his last. Speckled Beauty was as dead as his foe!

CHAPTER XI.

UNWELCOME VISITORS.

As Harry look upon the dead body of his brute friend, he could but feel saddened and pitiful. It had followed him and Robsart for hundreds of miles, in obedience to that emotion of affection, which is a characteristic of the entire animal

creation, and now it had given up its life to save him, who for days past had felt little but resentment toward it, for the mistake it had unwittingly made.

But little time was given the lad for indulgence in the finer emotions of his nature; for, while he stood leaning on his rifle, and looking down upon the mangled carcass, his ear, trained to unusual acuteness, detected the approach of something else, and he immediately raised his weapon and stood on the defensive.

"Another of those brutes," he thought, "but there is no Speckled Beauty to help me this time, and I can not throw away a shot— Helloa!"

Well might he start with alarm, for just then the figure of an Indian warrior came out of the gloom, and walked directly toward him. Harry turned his head to see what chance there was to dart back in the darkness upon that side, but only to encounter two other red-skins fully as near as the first!

He felt that he was fairly caught, and he could do nothing but submit to the inevitable with the best grace possible under the circumstances.

The two red-skins halted but a few feet distant, and remained standing and motionless, as if to shut off any attempt to escape, while they left to the third the part of chief actor and spokesman in the business.

As Harry turned again and looked fully in the face of the latter, it struck him that he had seen him before. He was tall and well-formed, with a gaudily-colored blanket covering his shoulders, and which thrown partly back from his front, showed a large hunting knife at his girdle. In his left hand he carried a rifle, while the right left free was extended in greeting toward the lad.

"How you do, white pappoose?" he asked with a grinning smile, and a perfection of accent that amazed the boy.

The latter could do nothing less than accept the proffered hand, although he did so with no little misgiving, fearing that it was only a prelude to some treachery upon his part.

But the Indian relinquished it the next moment, and then seemed disposed to act the part of an attorney conducting a cross-examination.

"Where you come from?" he demanded.

"From the fort, the other side of the mountains," replied the boy, extending his hand toward the north-east in which direction the frontier post lay.

"You come all alone—come away here—nobody with you?"

"Nobody is with me now excepting you and your warriors," said Harry.

"You come alone—who bring white pappoose from fort, away 'cross mountain?"

"The great hunter has been my guide and companion all the way."

"Which his name?"

The lad hesitated a moment, not knowing whether it was prudent or not to use deception under the circumstances, but his questioner manifested some impatience at the attempt already made to parry his queries, and he concluded it best to reply truthfully.

"He is known as Old Ruff the mountaineer, although he has been more in the trapping business lately; there lies one of the animals that he tamed to be his dog."

He noticed a slight manifestation of surprise upon the part of the Indian as he made this reply, and just then the impression came with renewed force that he had seen him before. Where could it be? Ah! now he recalled. He was one of the Blackfeet that he and Old Ruff had seen in the canoe, when scrutinizing Little Rifle through the field-glass.

Could it be Maquesa? was the next question that came to the mind of Harry, when he took occasion at the same instant to throw a sidelong glance at the other two, in the hope that possibly he could recognize one of them as the chief.

But the scrutiny through the glass had not been complete enough to enable him to do this. He believed that all three of his visitors had been in the canoes at that time, but whether either of them was the Blackfoot for whom he and the old hunter had been so persistently searching for many days, and for whom the trapper was hunting this very moment, whether he was one of the three, he could only conjecture.

When the red-skin received the reply recorded, he was silent a moment or two, looking sharply down in the face of the boy, who felt somewhat embarrassed by the keen scrutiny.

"Where he be now?" he asked, lowering his voice, but keeping his eyes fixed upon him.

"He is gone—he went away to day—he is down yonder at the foot of the mountain somewhere."

"Why he go—why he leave white pappoose all alone for big bear to eat him up?"

Harry became uneasy under these pointed questions—the object of which he could not divine. He was unwilling to be more explicit in his replies, until he could be certain of what the result of such a revelation was likely to be. So he rather ingeniously took up the appellation the Indian had applied to him, resenting it with an assumption of indignation.

"Why do you call me a pappoose?" he demanded, straightening up. "I am no more a babe than are your warriors. I am a hunter and a man!"

This grandiloquent reply caused a very perceptible grin upon the faces of all three Blackfeet, who seemed to admire the spirit of the lad; but it did not divert the leader from the "line" of questioning which he had laid out.

"Where old hunter go—why he leave little brave white man?"

"He has gone off on a hunt, and when he gets through, I suppose he will return."

Such a reply as this, it would seem, ought to have satisfied any ordinary mortal, and it would have done so, but for the fact that the red-skin was unquestionably upon the scent of something, and most probably knew a great deal more than he pretended.

"What he look for—big bear or big Injin?"

"He is looking for Maquesa, the great Blackfoot chief," replied Harry, feeling that there was no avoiding the issue; "he and I have been hunting for him for weeks, but have not been able to see him. Old Ruff thought to find him in his village, where he met him a long time ago, but the village is gone, and he knows not where he is."

"Why he look for big Injin chief?"

"Because he stole Little Rifle, and has run away with him," answered Harry, purposely using the masculine reference.

At this the Indian flared up, and replied in a quick, angry voice.

"You lie! Ruff steal pappoose from Maquesa—Maquesa take pappoose back from him."

That solved the question that had been puzzling Harry during the last few minutes. He knew now that he was talking to Maquesa himself.

After following him for days and weeks in vain, and when about ready to give up the search as hopeless, the chief had come forward from his hiding-place and shown himself.

The lad still felt himself in a dangerously delicate position, and he never longed so much for the presence of Old Ruff as he did now that he had discovered the identity of his interlocutor.

What was the object of these three men coming from the gloom and surrounding him in the manner that they had done? What did Maquesa mean by questioning him so closely? And what was their purpose regarding the boy whom they had so completely in their power?

These were the questions which the lad put to himself, and whose answers caused him no little trouble and anxiety.

Maquesa, upon making the foregoing reply, gave some signal to the other warriors, and all three seated themselves upon the ground, as if they had concluded to spend the night with him. Without waiting for an invitation, Harry followed suit, and he played the part of a host by drawing the cooked meat from beneath the stone, where he had hid it from prying animals, and offering it to his guests. But all declined accepting it, and he placed it back again.

As the chief remained silent for some time, Harry concluded to put some questions to him, on his own account, hoping to gain a little information, but somewhat distrustful of the result.

"Old Ruff found Little Rifle asleep, and no one was near; he thought the pappoose would die, and he brought it away to save its life."

"Old Ruff tell big lie! Pappoose in lodge—Maquesa close by—he come back, no find pappoose; get mad—burn down his lodge, and den go 'way. One, two, t'ree, good many moons, and he neber see her—t'ink she dead; den he hear Old Hunter hab Little Rifle—Maquesa t'ink *him* de squaw pappoose, and he come ober mountain arter her—she go 'way

wid him- Old Hunter try catch 'em, but he paddle too slow—can't find Little Rifle—and *neber see her again!*"

It would be impossible to describe the intensity of interest with which Harry Northend listened to these broken utterances of the chief, and the closing declaration that Little Rifle would never be seen again brought him to his feet in the greatest excitement.

"Why do you say that Little Rifle will never be seen again? What have you done with her? Is she dead? What has become of her?"

Maquesa and the other Indians looked quietly at the excited lad, as if rather amused than otherwise at his flurry; but the chief showed no disposition to be as explicit in his replies as Harry himself had been. It was not until the question had been repeated that he answered:

"Little Rifle gone—Old Hunter and white pappoose neber see her 'gin!"

Had Harry Northend been certain that Maquesa had been the cause of the girl's death, he would have sprung upon him as the mottled bear sprung upon the savage beast; but, by this time, he had managed to think a little, and his own common sense taught him that it was extremely improbable that the Blackfoot had done her any personal harm. Her history, as revealed by the slip of paper, pointed to a different conclusion altogether.

It was useless to attempt to question Maquesa, when he was not disposed to reply; but Harry took a different course, in the hope of reaching the truth in another way.

"Do you hunt for Big Hunter?"

The wily Blackfoot was fully authorized to grin, as he did, when he said:

"When Maquesa look for Big Hunter, *Maquesa can find him!*"

Suddenly the boy recalled the mystery which had puzzled him so long, and it seemed to him that the means of solving it might be now placed in his hands.

"Can you tell me, Maquesa, why it was that Little Rifle left me, as she did, and went away with you? You did not steal her, and why should she go without awaking from her sleep and saying good-by to me?"

The chief was about to answer this query fully and explicitly (a half-dozen words would have done it), when perverse fate interfered and closed his mouth again, with the all-important words upon his very tongue.

CHAPTER XII.

THE REVELATION OF MAQUESA.

THE interference, this time, came in the shape of Old Ruff Robsart himself, who strode forward out of the gloom, and advancing straight to the chief, extended his hand, and said :

"How do you do, Maquesa ? I have been huntin' fur yer for a long time."

The Blackfoot returned the salutation with every appearance of cordiality, much to the surprise of the other two redskins, who were hardly prepared for the exhibition of any thing like friendship between a white man and one of their race.

Having paid his respects to him, the trapper turned to his young friend with one of his huge grins, that moved his beard clean back to his ears.

"I don't s'pose you war lookin' fur me ; but the way on it was—while I was huntin' round fur that Injin village that had strayed off somewhar and got lost, I found thar was a little clump of lodges closer by, and I made up my mind to pay them a visit fust. Wal, I was trampin' 'long when I heard your gun go off, and purty soon I heard it go agin, and then I knowed you war in some row, so I struck a bee-line fur you, and here I is. Hello!" he exclaimed, noticing the bodies of the two wild animals for the first time, "that war the trouble, eh ? And as sure as I'm alive, thar's old Speckled Beauty gone under at last. Tell me how it all came about."

As the Blackfeet showed no disposition to interfere, or prevent this conversation, Harry related, as briefly as possible, what the reader has already learned of his adventure with the strange animal, from whose clutches he was hardly saved by

the timely coming to his assistance of the tame grizzly bear.

"He always war a plucky critter," said the mountaineer, when the recital was finished, and speaking as though he had no particular regrets at his death; "I thought that ever since the time when he war a cub, and come mighty near chawin' me up; but what sort of critter was it that he lit on?" he asked, as he walked forward to examine it.

The trapper poked the carcass with his foot and gun, for some minutes, stooping down and peering at it with no little curiosity. Finally he seemed to give up the conundrum as past his ability.

"See here, Maquesa," said he, turning to the chief, "you was born and raised in the woods. Come and tell me what sort of a critter this is."

The Blackfoot thus appealed to walked forward, and made the same examination as did his white friend, but seemingly with very little more success.

"Hoooh!" he grunted, "he no bear—he debbel!"

"P'r'aps he is," was the comment of Old Ruff, as he walked back and resumed his seat, "but I didn't know the Old Boy was killed as easy as that."

This piece of badinage being finished, the party arranged themselves for more serious business. The two red-skins, who had acted the part of dummies thus far, lit their pipes and stretched out in a lazy posture upon the ground, ready and willing to wait their master's orders, no matter how long they might be deferred.

Maquesa and Old Ruff seated themselves near each other, and Harry assumed a position where he could be certain of hearing every word that passed between them. Great, therefore, was his disappointment, when they began talking, to find that it was in the Blackfoot tongue!

"Confound it!" he exclaimed, desperately, "if I had known that *that* was the trick they were going to play, I would have learned the gibberish myself."

But there seemed to be no help for it, and he concluded to take the matter philosophically. So he gathered his blanket about him, and, nestling down by the rocks, went to sleep.

It was well he did so, for thereby he escaped a weary

waiting. Maquesa and Robsart must have entered into the discussion of political questions, for, although it was not very late in the evening when they began, yet they never finished until nearly daylight.

Finally there seemed to be no more for either to say, and the Blackfoot rose, shook the hand of the trapper, in token of amity, and then speaking to his warriors, they too arose, and the three moved off in the gloom and were seen no more.

The fire had burned very low, the two speakers paying no heed to it in the earnestness of their conversation. The old hunter cast on a few more sticks, and then rising and yawning he looked off at the sky.

It was still dark, but in the east were signs of the coming sun. His experienced eye told him that day was close at hand.

"Skulp me!" he growled, "ef I thought our confab had lasted as long as that. Thar's the younker curled up and snoozin' like a sensible chap. I seen him curl down here, thinkin' he was goin' to hear every word and I'arn a good deal; but I nipped that by opening the ball in Blackfoot rigmarole, 'cause I knowed thar war some things which it wouldn't do fur him to hear just yit. He'll I'arn it all in good time, and bein' it's so late I guess thar ain't no use in my layin' down. I grabbed a couple of salmon out of an eddy in the water, down yender, and dressed 'em, and laid 'em away 'mong the leaves, 'cause thar wasn't 'nough for these red varmints, and they kin catch thar fish as well as me. I'll get 'em and cook 'em for breakfast, and I guess when they begin to smoke and fry, and he gets a sniff, he'll wake."

He disappeared for a short time, and when he returned he carried two large spotted fish in his hand. They were plump and luscious, and all prepared for the coals.

The fire, having been burning and smoldering for so many hours, was in the best condition possible. The coals were raked out into a glowing bed, free from dirt and ashes, and the two fish laid thereon.

Instantly scorching crisp, they gave out a smoke and savor enough to drive a hungry person frantic. The trapper carefully watched and turned them for several minutes, by which time they were thoroughly prepared for the palate.

By this time it was fairly light, and Harry not having awaked, Old Ruff having lifted one of the hot, smoking fish upon some fresh green leaves, and, kneeling softly beside the lad, held the morsel so that the odor was sure to reach the nostrils.

One good sniff was enough. The boy moved uneasily, flung the blanket from his shoulders, opened his eyes, and called out:

"Quick! give me something to eat before I starve!"

"All right, you shall have it," replied Old Ruff, "only sit up like a Christian and eat it."

A few minutes sufficed to make matters clear, and as Harry began to eat the tempting fish he looked around for the Black-feet, and seeing them not, made inquiry.

"That 'ere Maquesa is the cunningest varmint I ever run afoul of," said the trapper, after answering the question; "of course he knowed that I was arter him, ever since that night Speckled Beauty walked into camp and told him so. He never stopped to see me, but he just tramped ahead, and arter fixing things to suit him, he then turned 'bout to meet me. He must have seen us when I left you yesterday, and, waitin' till I had got out of sight, he went in to plague you a little, for the old greaser ain't above a joke now and then."

"But he showed no disposition to hurt me," said Harry.

"'Cause I come up in time to sp'ile thar game, but ef I'd stayed away a couple of hours longer they'd put you through a course of sprouts, and made you b'l'ieve sartin you war goin' to be skulped and burnt at the stake. That was all them varmint's come fur—just for the sake of having a little fun out of you."

"Then I'm very glad you put in an appearance when you did, for I don't fancy these red-skins, and I don't understand all the little tricks they're up to. If they had begun that business I'd been certain they were in dead earnest, and would have done my best to use my gun or rifle upon them, and then I suppose the fun would have turned to dead earnest."

"You may bet on that; *that* ain't the kind of fun they fancy, and them other two chaps with him are a couple of

bloody dogs that would have been glad of the chance to split your head open."

"But what about Little Rifle?" asked Harry, unable longer to conceal his impatience. "I noticed that you talked Indian, so you must have given Maquesa a chance to do most of the talking."

"He speaks English purty well, but of course it ain't like his own woshy-boshy, so I steered ahead in *that*."

"And what did you learn?"

"It was a mighty strange story that he told," said the trapper, seriously, "and it's nothin' more nor less than this. He said that a couple of moons ago, he l'arned that the little gal that had been left in his charge was the Little Rifle that I had, and so he came across the mountains arter her."

"How was it that he found out?" asked Harry. "Who could have told him the secret, when, at that time, even you and Little Rifle herself did not know it?"

"That's the question I put to him, and he wouldn't answer, but I don't b'l'ieve any one told him, but that he thought it out for himself. Of course it took him a long time, for he has known for a good many years that Little Rifle has been with me, but the old chap has got brains enough to cipher out a thing like that, without any help."

"How does his story correspond with that told by the slip of paper?"

"'Zactly; he says the babe was left in his charge by a great white man, who thought all the world of him, and that he seen him write something on a slip of paper, and put it in the handle of the gun. He and his squaw took it to their lodge on the other side the mountains, and war keepin' it thar. They often left it alone, and it happened at one of these times that I slipped in and went away with it, and I've had it ever since."

"Then it was Maquesa who succeeded in getting her away from us. Did he tell you why it was that she came to leave me so willingly?"

"No; he didn't tell me that, 'cause thar warn't no need of it. I knowed it already."

Harry had hoped to catch the trapper off his guard, and

secure the coveted answer, but Robsart saw through the trick in time to escape.

"But what is he doing with Little Rifle? Why does he keep her?"

"He says he hasn't got her at all—that he hasn't seen her for several days—and that he never expects to see her again."

CHAPTER XIII.

COUNTERPLOTING.

HARRY NORTHEED sat astounded and stupefied at the answer of Old Ruff, and when he had partly regained his self-poise he repeated the words.

"Maquesa says he has not seen her for several days, and never expects to see her again. Is that what the chief said?"

"Them's almost his words 'zactly—leastways, that's 'zactly what he meant."

"In the name of Heaven, what does he mean?"

"He says that he has met the father of Little Rifle—that he met him a couple of weeks ago, and that it was on his account he came through the mountains arter her. Her father waited somewhere for him—down toward the Willamette, I b'l'ieve, at one of the forts. Thar Maquesa met him, and thar he turned over Little Rifle to him, and both have started for Astoria, whar they're going to take ship for San Francisco."

Here was a revelation indeed, and for several minutes Harry sat with open mouth, hardly able to realize all that had been said. Before he could make any comment the trapper added, in a significant tone:

"That's a big story to tell, and it may all be true, but somehow or other I think old Maquesa was lying to me, and tryin' to throw me off the right track."

"What is it you suspect, Uncle Ruff?"

"I don't know as I kin tell 'zactly," he answered, with a puzzled air as he scratched his head, "but he let drop one

or two things that made me think he was very anxious to get you and me off to Astoria, where we'd be out of his way."

"You think, then, that that part of his story was a fabrication?"

"Yes; I don't believe Little Rifle has started for Astoria; but thar's some truth, too, in what the varmint said."

"And how much?"

"That's hard to tell; but I s'pect he has met the father of Little Rifle, or else, when he went away a good many years ago, the man promised to come back ag'in, and the time being 'bout up, Maquesa has started off to hunt up his little gal for him."

"That does not seem probable to me," said Harry, after a moment's thought. "No man would go away or remain away voluntarily for years, knowing that his only daughter was among a tribe of barbarous savages. No father could willingly leave a child to grow up among them, as your theory would make Mr. Ravenna do."

"I guess you're right," replied the trapper. "I didn't think of all that, but I kin see the reason in it now. It must be, then, that Maquesa is waiting to see the father, and wishes to get us out the way until arter he delivers her up."

"That seems very likely," said Harry; "there is reason and consistency in all that."

"Arter he turns the gal over to the father, then I s'pose he don't care, and we kin tramp and hunt all we're a mind to."

"Why does he wish us to go to Astoria?"

"Thar ar' ships sailin' from thar to Fr'isco. The smart dog thinks when we git thar, that we'll just hear of some vessel goin' down the coast, and will be sartin the father and gal have gone, and we'll start arter 'em. That'll put us out of the way for a couple of months, you see, and that'll give the old coon plenty time to get through with his part of the business, and when we come back mad and tearing, what'll he care?"

"You suspect, then, that Little Rifle is still in the hands of Maquesa?"

"That's what I think. As long as he was on the go with her, he didn't mind how hard we follered arter, for he could

dodge us all the time ; but now he's settled down for a while, and it'll take 'bout all his time to watch the gal, without watchin' us too."

"And Little Rifle is probably at Maquesa's village close at hand?"

"I shouldn't wonder, and of course I'm going to find out afore I make a fair start for Frisco. I ain't quite 'nough fool to start off on such a hunt without something more than the word of Maquesa."

"But you know how cunning he is, Uncle Ruff; he will be on the watch for us, and it will be hard for you to reconnoiter the village without his discovering it; and that will show him that we don't believe what he has told us."

"He's beat me up to this time," replied the trapper, with a grin, "but if he beats me now, I'll leave the woods and mountains, and open an oyster saloon in Frisco. But come! do you see how high the sun is? Let's be off."

Harry noticed that as they moved away the old man headed for the Columbia river, which lay off to the south-west, and to reach which by the present route, would carry them entirely out of the way of the Indian village in which Maquesa ruled and reigned.

The trapper explained by saying that his intention was to "fool" the chief into the belief that he had given his words full credence, and was really on his way for the little trading-post at the head of the Columbia.

"He's very kind—oncommonly so," he added; "he told me where I could find one of his canoes, which he said was a mighty good thing to shoot the Dalles with. We'll take it, and p'raps use it for that."

The river was still a goodly distance away, and it was a couple of hours before they reached it; but, so explicit had been the instructions of the Blackfoot, that scarcely fifteen minutes passed, after striking the stream, before the boat was found, and the two entered, and headed down-stream, Old Ruff paddling at a leisurely rate, like one who has a week of labor ahead.

Not until they had rounded a large bend in the river, did he make any reference to the Blackfoot who had sent them upon this errand. Then it was to inquire:

"Didn't notice nothin' 'ticular when we shoved off, younker?"

Harry replied in the negative, wondering to what he referred.

"Maquesa and another varmint were on t'other side the river, watchin'. I seen 'em, but they didn't know it. You see, they wa'n't sartin whar I meant to go, and that's what they war after."

"Then you are certain they have been deceived as to what you mean to do?"

"Ain't sartin yet, and I don't b'lieve he is. I'm paddlin' mighty slow, as you have obsarved, 'cause I'm expecting he'll take another squint. Ef he does, it will be from the top of that swell yender. He orter reached it by this time, 'cause we haven't traveled fast. Jes' turn your glass that way—as careless, like, you know, as you can—and see whether you can catch sight of any top-knots."

The boy did as requested, and after a few seconds' careful survey, he declared that he saw nothing suspicious. The swell alluded to was upon the right bank of the river, rising to a hight of a dozen feet or so, with no trees, but covered with long, luxuriant grass.

"Let me take it," said Robsart to Harry, and turning it in the direction indicated, he held it motionless for considerable time, leaving the canoe to drift with the current.

"Don't see nothin' of him," he said, still holding the instrument to his eye; "guess he thinks thar ain't no use of his going to Astoria—Skulp me! ef I didn't cotch a glimpse of his top-knot then. He's a-layin' flat, and raised his noddle jist high 'nough for me to see it through the grass. Now its down ag'in."

Several times this was repeated, until the trapper, convinced that he was entirely alone, grew weary, and passing the telescope to his companion, resumed the paddle.

The Columbia, at this part of its course, was quite broad and winding, and by keeping close to the shore, Robsart managed his boat in such a way that, while he appeared to be at work all the time, he was in reality making little progress; for, as will be easily seen, every rod thus passed over, very likely would have to be tramped back, not once but twice again.

The experienced eye of the trapper was enabled to discover, almost to a certainty, the points from which the Blackfoot chief would make his observations, and after doubling another cape, he directed the glass to the suspicious point.

But a careful survey, repeated many times, failed to reveal any thing at all; and the conclusion was inevitable.

Maquesa had been satisfied in his own mind that his statements were fully credited, and that the two were on their way to the mouth of the Columbia. Consequently he had withdrawn from watching and following them.

Another result from all this was the conviction that the chief had been using deception, and that, in the words of Harry, they had not only overtaken Little Rifle, but had passed beyond her, and to find her again, they must turn about and retrace a goodly part of the distance.

Old Ruff Robsart, understanding the tricky nature of Maquesa as he did, dared not take any thing for granted, and although almost positive that he was no longer under surveillance, he kept up his semblance of journeying westward until the sun went down, and darkness wrapped the forest and stream in its sable mantle.

And then, as soon as assured that he was under the scrutiny of no prowling red-skin, he shot the canoe under the bank and leaped out.

Every thing had been arranged beforehand, so that no time was now lost in the exchange of words.

Harry was to remain where he was until his return, no matter if he was absent a month. This was to be a journey entirely on foot, and the trapper's legs had enjoyed such a good rest that they felt capable of almost any thing. A run of a dozen miles would be no more than enough to give them a good stretching.

After springing ashore, he merely uttered a word of parting, and then whisked away like a shadow, leaving Harry Northend alone.

The latter made up his mind for a good long period of waiting, so he ran the canoe out a short distance into the stream, where he made the stern fast to a long, outreaching limb, and then, wrapping himself up in his blanket, went to sleep.

Nothing occurred to interrupt his sleep, and when he awoke,

the stream was sparkling in the sunshine, and the cool, fresh morning air was crinkling the surface.

The next sensation of which he was aware was one of excessive hunger, and unfastening the boat, he paddled ashore and sprung out to go on a hunt after something.

Harry drew the canoe up the bank and entirely out of the water, remembering the caution that the trapper always took at such a time, not merely from any sudden rising of the current but to prevent its catching the eye of any foes who might pass up or down stream.

This done to his own satisfaction, he threw his rifle upon his shoulder and was just starting off upon his hunt, when the crackling of a branch told him that some one was approaching!

CHAPTER XIV.

DOWN THE COLUMBIA.

THE next moment the copse parted, and to the surprise and pleasure of Harry Northend, not an Indian or wild animal, but old Robsart himself appeared.

The lad was not expecting him before nightfall, but he had strong hopes that when he did come, he would bring Little Rifle with him; when he saw, therefore, that he was entirely alone, the pleasure of meeting his old friend again was mingled with a bitter disappointment.

But the trapper did not appear cast down or discouraged, although he, too, was apparently disappointed in the result of his journey.

After grasping the hand of the lad, he said:

"What do you s'pose, younker? Arter all I've said, and arter all we've seen, that Maquesa has been tellin' me nothin' but the truth itself."

"Are you in earnest?" inquired Harry, with no little amazement.

"Never more in 'arnest in my life; I got a look into thar village, and was mighty lucky in finding the lodge of Maquesa

himself. Thar I listened fur a half-hour, while he talked with his squaw, and what I heard him say made me sartin that Little Rifle has joined his father, and with a couple of Injins to guide 'em, they're gone down the Columbia, on thar way to Frisco. If we ever expect to overhaul 'em, that's just what we've got to do. The little gal is still ahead of us, and we're a good ways behind."

"How much have they the start of us?" asked Harry.

"I dunno; but I think it can't be fur from two days, and mebbe a good deal more."

"Do you think there is any probability of our overtaking them, before they reach the mouth of the Columbia?"

"The chances are all ag'in' it; 'cause it ain't likely that them two red-skins have slept much on thar way. You know the old man would be purty sartin to give 'em good pay and hurry 'em up all he could. I shouldn't wonder if they've set him and Little Rifle already ashore, and then our only chance is that the vessel they're goin' on don't sail afore we git thar."

"Then let us be off at once."

Both were so eager to get forward that they took no more time than was absolutely necessary for taking their dinner. The day was clear and pleasant, just cool enough to make the exercise of paddling exhilarating to one of Old Ruff's powerful, healthy frame.

He worked as untiringly as a steam engine, and aided by the swift current of the Columbia they made good progress toward the ocean.

All the way along the river the trapper was on the lookout for the returning canoe, in which Ravenna and Little Rifle had been taken to Astoria. Having seen nothing of it thus far, he had strong hopes of reaching the mouth of the Columbia so near behind it as to intercept their friends before they started for San Francisco.

At the same time there was the possibility, if not the probability, that the returning Blackfeet had either gone back overland or had avoided them.

The most vivid reminder that they were out of the woods was the sudden appearance of a sloop coming up-stream. It was under full sail, and at first sight of it Harry started and

exclaimed that they were now indeed in a land of civilization.

The Columbia is ascended by large vessels to Fort Vancouver, about a hundred miles from the mouth, while vessels of very light draught now reach a point nearly double that distance.

A few miles further, and just as the day was drawing to a close, our friends came in sight of a schooner anchored close to shore.

Robsart ran the little boat alongside, and finding several of the crew aboard, made inquiries as to whether they had noticed a canoe going by at any time during the past few days.

Upon hearing the question the sailors laughed, and declared that they had seen fully a hundred during the week that they had been ascending the river; and even when the trapper explained particularly the number and general appearance of the occupants of the one he was seeking, the seamen could give no satisfactory answer, and Old Ruff resumed his journey, rather ill-naturedly remarking that it was no use of making inquiries of men who knew nothing and never would know any thing.

They had come a long distance during the day and the trapper needed rest. Accordingly the boat was run ashore, turned over on its face, and they sought and procured lodgings in a little settlement that stood back a short distance from the shore.

As may be believed, the sun was scarcely above the horizon when the canoe was again speeding down the Columbia, which was rapidly expanding in depth and width as they advanced.

They had now passed the last great bend in this majestic river, and had almost a due westerly course before them until they should reach the Pacific. Off to the north-east they could see the massive snow-covered peak of St. Helen's, as it towered aloft for fully thirteen thousand feet. Shortly after they glided by the mouth of a considerable stream that put in from the north.

Just as the twilight descended upon wood and stream the canoe reached Astoria, and this portion of their journey was finished.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SEA TRAIL.

ALTHOUGH, as we have said, the day was drawing to a close when our friends landed in Astoria, they lost no time in making search for Little Rifle and her father, directing their steps, naturally enough, to the old tavern which stands back some distance from the river.

"*Thar they ar' now!*" suddenly exclaimed Old Robsart.

"Where? where?" asked Harry, starting and looking about in great excitement.

"Thar! don't you see 'em? I mean them two red-skins that fotched 'em here! They're Blackfeet, both of 'em; they're the very varmints we've been lookin' fur."

As he spoke he pointed out two Indians seated upon the ground, with a bottle of whisky between them. Sure enough they were the very men that had brought down Ravenna and his daughter from the Blackfoot village. Having been well paid for their work they had purchased a few gaudy ornaments at the fort, and were now fast drinking themselves dead drunk upon the red-man's great enemy, "fire-water."

Indeed they were so far gone now, that there was very little to be got out of them, and Old Ruff would have succeeded no better than he did with the sailors up the river, had he not snatched their whisky-bottle away from them, and sworn that they should not have it again, until they answered him every question.

After a half-hour's hard work, he learned that they had reached Astoria on the preceding day with their charge, that they had seen them sail away in a "much big canoe" toward the great lake, as they supposed, on a trip to some happy hunting-ground.

At the tavern or inn, more definite information was gained. They learned that Mr. Ravenna had arrived there in a ship from San Francisco, several weeks before, and remaining only

a day, had hired a couple of hunters to take him up the river to meet some Indian chief. On the preceding day he had returned, in a canoe under the charge of the two Blackfeet, and having with him, what seemed a boy, attired in Indian dress. He was very quiet, had scarcely anything to say, and very little was seen of him.

They had taken passage on this same morning for San Francisco, in the same vessel that had brought the father there, and by this time were fairly out to sea, on their way thither.

This was to the point, as were the query and answer as to when another boat left the port for the same destination. The captain of the schooner Albatross was sitting in the bar-room at the time, and replied that he should weigh anchor at sunrise on the morrow, when the tide would be in and the bar could be passed without trouble.

Could he take a couple of passengers who would pay him well for the accommodation?

Certainly; any thing in the way of business, and to please the gentlemen.

But just here, the trapper called Harry aside and conveyed the unexpected startling information that he had decided to go no further.

"What's the use?" he said, by way of explanation. "I can't be of no further help to you; all you've got to do, is to go on board the Albatross, and squat down and wait till she lands you in Fr'isco. When you git there you kin hunt out the little gal as well without as you kin with me. I must look after them furs and peltries of mine, and when I go back I'll stop at Fort Abercombie, and tell your old man that you're all right, and you know that'll be a great satisfaction to him. You're on the right track now, and thar ain't no Blackfeet in the way to make any bother. You've got plain sailin', and like 'nough you'll git into Fr'isco as soon as the other boat does. Leastways you'll have no trouble to find the little critter, and when you do, give her my love, and tell her I'll be down that way purty soon, to see her, or I'll foller her wherever she goes. Don't you see, younker, that that's the true plan and the best one?"

Harry could not help seeing the force of what the trapper

said, and he admitted it; but as he had not the least thought of such a proceeding upon his part, it required some time for him to feel perfectly resigned to it.

The agreement was made that Old Ruff should remain over night with Harry at the inn and then start on his return to the beaver runs beyond the Cascade Range, while he should move down the coast toward San Francisco.

And with this understanding the parties retired at a late hour.

The arrangement was carried out almost to the letter, as the trapper left the inn at an early hour, bidding Harry an affectionate farewell, with the confident hope that they would soon meet again.

It was nearly noon when the Albatross crossed the bar at the mouth of the river, ten miles further down, and placed herself fairly on the Pacific ocean.

As soon as the sloop was fairly out to sea, and sailing northward, Harry gave himself up to the enjoyment of the scene. Walking to the prow, he took a station where he was not likely to be in the way and feasted upon the view, which was a novel and deeply interesting one to him.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WIND THAT BLEW NO GOOD.

WHEN Harry Northend finally aroused himself from the fanciful dreams into which he had fallen, the sun had gone down, and it was already growing dark. He noticed that the sea was heavier than usual, and the ship tossed and pitched in a way that was any thing but pleasant to a landsman.

He had a dread of being sea-sick, but it may be that there was something in the rough out-door life that he had been leading during the past few months that acted as a preventive; for now, when the real test had come, in the tossing and heaving of the sea, he was not sensible of the slightest disturbance, and, as he descended into the cabin to take his

supper with the captain, that functionary took occasion to congratulate him upon his good fortune.

"Perhaps I may get sick yet," timidly returned the boy, "as we are only fairly started on our trip, I suppose."

"Perhaps you will," was the hearty reply of the captain, as he helped himself to a huge slice of fried pork, "though a chap, if he is going to have it, is pretty sure to show signs of it by this time. However, we are going to have rough weather before we get through."

Harry looked up at the bronzed and bearded face with some apprehension.

"Do you mean that a storm is brewing?"

"Exactly; I can always feel it in that larboard leg of mine—a touch of the rheumatics, you know—a reg'lar barometer—sure to tell me when trouble is coming."

"What sort of a coast have we here?" asked the boy.

"It is one of the infernalesst coasts in the whole creation," was the reply of Captain Cole. "I was wrecked on it twice, and the last time I came up, only missed it by a hair's breadth."

Harry could not but feel alarmed at the words of the captain; but beyond his own personal fear, was anxiety about Little Rifle, who, he knew, was at no great distance ahead, and whose vessel would be caught in the same tempest, if it should come, and would, in all human probability, share the same fate.

"Do you know what boat Mr. Ravenna and his daughter sailed upon?" he asked of the officer.

"Certainly," was the prompt answer. "It was the North Star, a schooner belonging to the Smith Brothers, of Frisco, engaged in the same trade with us."

"Is she a stanch vessel, able to weather such a storm as seems to be coming?"

"She is one of the rottenest, good-for-nothingest old hulks in the trade. It's a wonder to me that she hasn't gone to the bottom before, for she ain't any better than an old tub."

This was very dispiriting tidings, to say the least, and Harry began to believe that instead of being through with the difficulties and dangers, the greatest still remained before them.

As if to emphasize the words of the captain, the whistling of the wind through the cordage at this moment rose so high and shrill, that they distinctly heard it in the cabin, although the door was closed. At the same time the vessel made a deep plunge into the sea.

Captain Cole shook his head in a knowing way.

"Oh, I tell you it's coming, sure; you can make up your mind to that. I tell you that a *howler* is coming up!"

The captain arose and went on deck, and Harry followed him, that he might see for himself the prospect before them.

The change that he encountered was enough to make the strongest man, unaccustomed to the sea, draw back in terror.

It was of pitchy darkness, and the gale, as it whistled through the rigging, rose and swelled like the shrieking of spirits in the air, as they floated high above the mast, or glided over the deck; the wind that blew against his cheeks brought with it the brine of the ocean, and he instinctively clapped his hand upon his head to prevent his hat being carried away.

The sloop was pitching and tossing quite heavily, but still she held her own. All sail was crowded on, and she seemed to be under capital control, if it would only last.

The captain speedily vanished in the gloom, as he went to take his place at the helm, and relieve the mate, who had been stationed there during his absence.

When Harry found himself out of the cabin and upon the deck, he staggered to the gunwale, where he caught hold with both hands and held on, while he listened and looked, and endeavored to gain a fair view of the situation.

"There is a strong gale of wind," he thought, as the spray went dashing over his head; "but I can not see why there should be any great danger. She has not taken in any sail yet, and so long as the wind keeps as it is, it will only hurry us on our way."

Looking aloft, not a star was to be seen. The sky seemed to be wrapped in the densest, blackest gloom.

Looking off to the southward, Harry fancied, once or twice, that he detected a bright point of light appear through the night.

Only for an instant was it visible, when it vanished again,

and he supposed it was produced by the phosphorescence of the sea, until he happened to be gazing directly toward the point where it appeared, when it struck him that its appearance was different from that. It was more like the glimmering of a star, that is shut out at intervals by some dark body coming between it and the observer, to reappear again in a few moments.

While Harry was puzzling his brains over the singular appearance of this light, somebody slapped him upon the shoulder, causing him to turn with a suddenness that almost threw him off his feet.

In the murky gloom, he was barely able to make out a human figure, which he suspected was that of the captain.

"Come, my boy, you had better go below!" he called out, in a cheery voice.

"Can you tell me what that light means?" Harry inquired.

"Where? I don't see any," replied the officer, halting by his side.

"It is gone now—there it is again. Look! it seems like a star!"

"Oh, that! Why that's the binnacle light of another boat."

"Do you know what one it is?" asked the lad, with a vague but terrible misgiving freezing his heart.

"Hardly enough light to read her name; wait until morning, and I'll tell you what she is, and where she hails from."

Harry was about to ask more, but the captain moved away in the darkness, leaving him alone.

He remained on deck, watching the fitful twinkling of the point of light, as it rose to view on the crest of a wave, and then dipped out of sight again, and speculating as to what the night and following day would bring forth.

But, as the night advanced, he thought there was very little if any increase in the fury of the gale, and he descended into the cabin, where Captain Cole had placed a hammock at his disposal.

Here he committed his soul in fervent prayer to God, and then lay down without removing any of his garments; for he had no expectation of sleep, and had little hope that he would be permitted to remain undisturbed until the rising of the morrow's sun.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT OF THE NIGHT?

HARRY NORTHEEND had been through many perils and trying scenes in the wilderness of the North-west; but just now he felt more wretched from physical fear than ever before.

It was useless for him to lie upon his hammock, and he only did so because he had nothing else to do. Finally he leaped down upon the floor, and taking a seat upon the bench, concluded to sit out the night.

The lantern swinging from the roof threw a dim, yellow glare through the cabin, and, as he mechanically looked up, he saw a half-dozen life-preservers dangling beside it. They were made of cork, and were the same as he had often seen upon the Mississippi steamers.

Unfastening one of the useful articles, he carefully fastened it beneath his shoulders, and then resuming his seat, waited as the terrible moments dragged slowly by.

Harry was sitting with bowed head, his thoughts upon his mother and home, when he was again brought to his feet by another outburst. This time it was the heavy boom of thunder, that appeared to burst overhead, scarcely higher than the masts, and which made the sloop tremble as if struck by a mountainous surge.

This was the first time since starting that he had heard the noise of thunder, and somehow or other, whether with or without reason, we can not say, he had mainly founded his hope upon that fact, persuading himself that so long as that was absent, there was good reason for believing the vessel would safely ride out the gale.

The boat was still shivering beneath the shock, when there came another rattling, reverberating peal, ten times louder than before, and that paralyzed Harry for the moment with terror.

"The vessel has been struck!" he gasped, as soon as he recovered his self-possession, and then staggering to the door,

he drew it open, and looked out, expecting to see the boat hissing in flames.

But no; it was still unharmed; but the dense blackness was cut in a hundred places by the zigzag lightning, that was flaming from every portion of the heavens, and seemed to be playing about the vessel preparatory to splitting it into a thousand fragments.

Harry partially ascended from the cabin, and then paused transfixed by the terrible scene. It was now raining, the drops of water being carried along almost horizontally by the hurricane, and striking his face like particles of sand. By the intense brightness of the lightning, he could catch sight of the towering billows that rushed tumultuously toward the doomed vessel, each one, as if it were about to overwhelm it, their tops white with foam, while their concave walls appeared, as momentarily seen, as if they were of ink.

The wind shrieked and moaned through the cordage, and the captain's orders, as he shouted them through his speaking-trumpet, sounded as if they came from some point miles away. By the same vivid flashes, he caught sight of him and the seamen, standing like statues, cool, self-possessed, and ready for whatever the elements should bring them.

Harry was recalled to a more vivid sense of his perilous position by a tremendous surge, which striking the side of the vessel with all its force, instead of dashing itself into spray and mist, broke so as to send an immense volume bodily across the decks, precipitating itself against him with such violence that he was thrown senseless to the floor of the cabin.

He had an indistinct recollection of hearing the door slammed to at the same instant, and concluded, when he recovered his senses, that it had been done by one of the seamen, as a reminder for him to keep it closed, so as to prevent the water from entering, the hatches having long since been fastened down.

The lad did not remain unconscious for any length of time. The sense of impending danger was too vivid and intense, and the shuddering and tossing of the vessel too constant for him to continue insensible to it. Recovering his feet he again sat down, holding on tightly to prevent himself being tossed upon his head.

And sitting there he could hear the mighty waves sweep over the deck with a fierce impetuosity that it seemed must rend the vessel asunder.

"How much longer, oh heaven! can this tortured vessel stand this?" he exclaimed, more than once, as it labored up from the trough of the sea.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WAITING FOR THE END.

THE terrible night wore slowly away. If the sloop *Albatross* was unseaworthy she still struggled manfully and bravely with the furious tempest. It seemed at times as if human ingenuity could not put timbers together strong enough to withstand the avalanche-like pounding of the mountain surges; but still she labored on, panting and plunging through the waves that broke and swept her decks from end to end.

It was near daylight, and Harry was sitting in the manner mentioned, when he observed that the floor of the cabin was covered with water. Of course a considerable quantity had been dashed in with him at the time he was struck by the wave and precipitated to the bottom, but it appeared that this quantity was increasing.

The constant pitching and tossing made it impossible for him to measure the bight by any mark upon the side of the cabin, but a few minutes' careful survey convinced him that he was not mistaken.

Just then the dull thumping of one of the pumps reached his ears, and he understood that the vessel was leaking.

His little knowledge of a vessel had led him to suppose that in case they sprung a leak the last place into which the water made its way was the cabin; but he could well understand how in such a gale as this such furious wrenching must open the seams in a score of places.

"She is leaking—that's certain!" he exclaimed, as the cousing and dashing of the water made his position anything

but a pleasant one. "I believe it will gain upon them too, if the storm continues much longer, so that the hold will fill with water."

Scarcely any change was to be noticed in the thunder-claps, which continually sounded in the ear with a stunning uproar to which Harry was in a certain respect indifferent. It was not the lightning which he feared, but the sea, the tempest; it was the shivering ship, the crashing billows, whose frightful perils he could not drive from his mind if he desired, which at any moment might consign him to the merciless ocean.

Finally he concluded to make the attempt to reach the deck again, for he was convinced from the way that the boat was laboring, and the increasing water in the cabin, that she was sinking, and he judged that Captain Cole was too much occupied to leave his post, and perhaps when the critical moment came would forget him altogether and leave him to his fate.

At the very moment he placed his hand upon the door it was shoved violently inward, and the stentorian voice of Captain Cole shouted:

"Come, my boy, time's up; are you ready to go to Davy Jones' locker?"

A frightful scene met his gaze as he came upon deck. The night was passed, but the morning that had succeeded was scarcely less terrible.

The wind, which had been blowing a hurricane, had abated somewhat, but a rain, mixed with snow, swept horizontally through the air, with a cutting chilliness; the billows came sweeping tumultuously forward, so close after each other that they looked like the snowy ridges of countless mountains; the hold of the vessel was half full of water, and she plunged and struggled like some dying monster.

No sunlight lit up the dreadful scene, but a gray, horrid mist shut out all sight for a distance of a hundred yards; the seamen seeing that all further effort was useless had lashed themselves to the rigging, but the stern Captain Cole disdained all such assistance, and managed by herculean strength and skill to keep himself from being washed overboard by the waves that broke ceaselessly over the deck.

Harry saw it was sure death to venture away, and he crouched down by the cabin, so as to permit it partly to shield him from the fearful avalanches of water.

The minutes seemed of eternal length, but he had been here only a few seconds when he became aware of a dull, booming roar that rose above the tumult of the tempest. The captain, maintaining a position near him, seemed to divine his thoughts, and stooping down so as to bring his mouth close to his ear, shouted:

"It is the breakers you hear! We shall strike in a few minutes! Hang on till the hulk goes to pieces, and then do what you can to reach shore. Can you swim?" he asked, noticing the life-preserver.

Harry nodded, for it was useless for him to attempt to speak in this pandemonium of sound.

"Can't help each other," shouted back the strong-lunged Captain Cole; "if I can, I'll do all that's possible for you."

The Albatross was drifting rapidly toward shore, for at this moment the bold, rocky headland of the California coast loomed up to view, with the churning breakers at their base, curling and foaming in their restless fury.

The rocks looked black, dripping and unutterably cheerless in the misty morning; but the yearning eyes that peered through the fog could see also the sand of the beach at their feet, showing standing-room for any who might be fortunate enough to be cast thither.

But, behold! As Harry looked he saw the dark hull of another vessel pounding against the shore. It had struck some time before, and while the bow remained immovably fixed, the stern was rearing and plunging in a way which showed that it must speedily go to pieces. Not even an iron-clad could withstand such blows as it was receiving each moment.

Harry Northend forgot his own peril in his interest in the scene. He could discern several figures clinging to the bow, and one of them as dimly revealed through the blinding mist and sleet, he was sure was Little Rifle, while the tall, dark form near her must be that of her father.

"It's the North Star!" screeched Captain Cole, who well understood the anxiety of the lad; "we're going to strike pretty near her. Hello!"

This exclamation was caused by a sudden thumping jar, followed by another plunge and then a fearful shock, that threw the captain forward upon his face, causing him to roll heavily against the gunwale, which he clutched, barely in time to save himself from going overboard.

Every blow of the waves only drove the prow the more firmly into the sand, while the stern, still in deep water, worked heavily around, until that, too, remained fast, and the Albatross thus lay broadside on, exposed to the full fury of the tempest; but a moment later, from some unexplained cause, the bow was lifted, and by a strange action of the waves, swung around, so that it pointed directly out to sea, and the rudder was the part nearest shore.

This rendered the stern the safest part, especially as the bow began working down in the sand, and it became necessary for Harry to shift his position. The seamen, by ascending some distance up the rigging and lashing themselves fast, had placed themselves above the reach of the waves, and Captain Cole, feeling that nothing else remained, prepared to do the same with Harry.

Watching his chance, he dashed forward, and catching the hand of the boy, had him at the foot of the ladder in a twinkling. Here another surge caught them, and but for the help of the officer, the boy would have been shot out on the crest of one of the billows, like an egg-shell.

But he knew what was required of him, and he went up the ladder as nimbly as a monkey, the captain at his heels, neither pausing until they reached a safe point, where they could maintain themselves with comparatively little difficulty for some time.

The trouble was, that if compelled to remain here very long, the driving sleet would so benumb their limbs that they would become unable to maintain their hold. The seamen, although strong and rugged men, had been on deck for twelve hours, and needed to be lashed to make sure of their footing.

But every probability was that not a soul would be left on board at the end of an hour, and this precaution was unnecessary in the case of the two who had last ascended.

It was not until Harry had been perched here for several

minutes that he was able to take a survey of his surroundings.

As the chief officer had predicted, they had struck the beach very near the other vessel—less than a hundred feet separated them—and, as the lad looked off in that direction, he saw among the three figures clustered at the bow that of Little Rifle.

Most of the crew of the North Star had also lashed themselves to the rigging, but the bow being much more sheltered than was that of the Albatross, the three persons mentioned were enabled to maintain themselves with little exertion.

The tall dark figure, which Harry supposed to be the father, had placed himself in such a position as to shut off most of the fury of the tempest from his loved daughter.

And Little Rifle, holding on like a heroine, as she was, looked off in the rigging of the other ship, and saw Harry Northend, who was also gazing toward her.

"Does she recognize me?" was the thought in the mind of the lad, as he gazed wistfully at her.

His heart warmed with delight, even at this awful time, when the next moment he saw her raise her hand and wave it toward him. Regardless of his own danger, he returned the salutation, and shouted back, but the sound scarcely reached the ears of the captain, directly below him.

In that moment what must have been the thoughts of Little Rifle?

She could but have known what the presence of Harry Northend meant at this time. That one glance must have told the story of his patient, loving following of her through forest and mountain, and over river and sea, until finally they were brought face to face again in the midst of the tempestuous fury of the Pacific.

"Ah! what would I not give for the privilege of exchanging one single word with her?" thought Harry, as he remained gazing steadfastly across the short but impassable chasm. "I wonder which of us will have to go first?"

Soon shall the question be answered.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LEAP FOR LIFE.

ALL this time the eye of Captain Cole was scanning the coast before them, and he was coolly weighing the chances it offered for an escape for him and his companions.

He noticed that the high, precipitous bluffs, as we have already mentioned, directly opposite them, sat back some distance from the shore. Were it otherwise, not the slightest hope would remain for the most daring swimmer that ever cleft the wave.

Not a living soul was to be seen upon these bluffs. He knew that further inland were marauding Indians, who, if they knew of the booty that was thus offered, would swarm along the shore in myriads, eager and impatient for the sea to cast the prey into their hands.

If they should appear, one would have little to choose between going down in the sea at rest, or in being washed ashore in the full possession of life and strength.

Harry had withdrawn his attention for the moment from the other vessel, when he felt the captain touch his leg; and, as he looked down at him to see what it meant, he pointed to the wreck.

One glance showed that it was breaking up. Large fragments could be seen tossed aloft by the waves, and to several of them, men were clinging.

Only two remained upon the prow and they were Little Rifle and her father. The other had also plunged into the boiling sea, in his desperate struggle for life.

"Why do they wait?" was the question that came involuntarily to the lips of the terrified lad; "they may as well take the leap first as last."

He had considerable hope of their escaping. He knew that Little Rifle was a perfect swimmer, and he had heard old Ruff Robsart tell of some of her wonderful exploits in water. It was to be supposed, of course, that her father was also an expert.

Instead of watching those upon the wreck, Captain Cole was carefully observing those who were in the water; for the probability was that whatever fate befell them would befall those who came after. If they escaped, so might he; if they failed, the probabilities were that he would.

He saw them carried swiftly southward, all passing close to his own boat, and one poor fellow was swept under the bow, bruised and drowned; but the three others, clinging to the fragments cleared the second wreck, and by a curious action of the eddying current, were whirled in so close to shore, that by tremendous and powerful swimming all three reached land and were seen to wade up the beach, dripping with brine, and scarcely able to stand.

This was encouraging, for the captain would not acknowledge that his superior in swimming had yet been born. It was characteristic of the man, that disclaiming all assistance in the shape of life-preservers or pieces of the wreck, he should fling himself boldly into the ocean and begin the struggle single-handed.

The eyes of Harry Northend were naturally fixed upon him, and he watched his movements with an intensity of interest that can scarcely be imagined. He observed that as he drifted southward, he aimed directly for the shore, swimming with a steady and powerful stroke. He made no attempt to prevent the foam of the breakers from going over his head; for the simple reason that he knew no mortal man can support himself in spray and foam. All that he can do, is to hold his breath, and wait for a chance to get another mouthful of air.

This the sailor did, surely and steadily approaching the shore, until as tossed high upon the crest of a mighty wave, he made land, and clinging to the sand, scrambled up out of the baffled waves.

Harry's eyes were upon the brave captain, and his heart gave a throb of pleasure as he saw that one at least had escaped, when something dark caught his eye in the water, and he saw that Little Rifle was in the water, clinging to a fragment of the wreck, and using might and main to reach the shore.

One glance at where the other wreck had been, showed that

It was gone. The sea was sweeping over the spot, and the only part that remained visible was that to which the two were holding fast, and this was spinning resistlessly in the current.

Harry would have saluted them by way of encouragement, as they passed, but they were too much engaged with their own work to glance right or left.

The lad wondered why it was that Little Rifle persisted in clinging to the plank, when her ability in swimming would enable her to make much better progress toward the shore ; but, as he watched the movements of the two, he rightly suspected that she did this to assist her father, who was not her equal in swimming, and who was afraid to trust himself alone in the waves.

The progress upon a raft is necessarily much slower than that of simply relying upon one's muscular power and skill in the water ; and so, with a terrible misgiving, he saw the two sweep on down the coast, without, so far as he was able to judge, coming any nearer.

It was plain that the exertions of the noble-hearted girl were intended mainly to benefit her parent. If she should fling herself loose from the float, and strike out for the shore, she could reach it as certainly as did Captain Cole, and the seamen of her own vessel.

As if to convince her of the truth of this, the sailors who had been lashed in the rigging of the Albatross, were now struggling in the water and steadily making their way to shore.

But certain death itself would not have dissuaded her from the attempt. With all her bravery and remarkable skill, she worked the craft toward the land, determined that if saved or lost, it should be in the company of her parent.

Harry felt that the time had come for him to make the "leap for life" ; for he was the only one left, and the wreck itself gave signs of breaking up ; but before doing so, he was anxious to see what became of Little Rifle ; for if she escaped, he would be nerved to make greater exertions for his own safety.

Harry took a look at the father and daughter, but it was not a very satisfactory one, and convinced that it would not

do for him to remain longer, he came carefully down the ladder, so as to leap into the sea in such a way as to run no danger of being swept under or against the hull.

He was nearly to the bottom, when there was a fearful swaying, and he saw that the wreck was turning upon its side.

Not a moment was to be lost, and with a prayer upon his lip, he leaped as far out in the boiling waves as was possible, and like Captain Cole, struck straight for shore, with all the strength at his command, dreading each moment to receive a crushing blow from the mast or one of the spars.

He escaped this, but he found it almost impossible to prevent himself from strangling, as he seemed to be under water nearly all the time.

But he struggled bravely as long as power remained. He could see the black rocks gleaming wet and cheerless near him; dim figures of men upon the beach—something like a shout—then all was blackness of darkness—and he knew nothing.

Was this death?

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

As Harry Northend found himself battling with the billows, he struggled manfully and heroically; for like every young, hopeful boy, he had everything to live for. His life preserver kept him from sinking, but it could not prevent the crests from curling over his head, and in this way, when he was comparatively a short distance from shore, he became bewildered, confused and strangled, and lost consciousness at the moment when only a few sturdy strokes were needed to carry him safely to land.

But here were a number who were watching his movements ready to give what assistance they could, the moment they could gain the opportunity to do so.

Little Rifle and her father succeeded in reaching land, without difficulty, and she was little exhausted. The moment

she felt the solid land beneath her, she turned about to see what had become of her friend Harry Northend. For one moment, she thought he was gone, but the next instant he rose to view on the crest of a wave, and she saw that he was struggling for life.

As he was drifting down the coast, the eight or ten persons on the beach hurried down, so as to keep opposite, and to be ready to lend a hand the moment it could be done.

"Oh, if we had a rope!" exclaimed Little Rifle, as she saw how vainly her lover was struggling, "we might save him."

"But we hain't got a rope," growled Captain Cole, "so what's the use? But we can form a line ourselves, and maybe get out to him."

This was no sooner mentioned than it was done, all taking hold of hands, and while those composing one end of the line stood on the shore, the others waded out as far as was prudent, the whole line running backward when it was deemed prudent, or those furthest out to sea did their best to "ride" the billows, as they came rolling in.

Captain Cole intended to take the outer end or post of danger himself, but seeing the anxiety of Little Rifle, and noticing her excellence as a swimmer, he permitted her to go out, while he griped her small hand in his horny palm, with a power that would have pulled the arm from the socket before it would have permitted it to be withdrawn from his grasp.

It was well that the captain retained his hold upon the hand or wrist of Little Rifle; for her anxiety to get out to the assistance of the despairing Harry Northend was so great, that she would have plunged directly among the waves, careless of her own fate, in her desire to save him.

But the sailor would not permit any such vicarious sacrifice as that, struggle as much as she might. Three separate times Little Rifle attempted to catch the coat of the boy, as he went up the billow; but he was too weak to help himself, and she just missed him each time.

Again a giant wave carried him aloft, and, as Captain Cole gave her more room, she threw herself into it also, with the resolve to secure him this time, no matter at what cost.

A desperate clutch, as far out as the iron grip of the sailor would permit, and her hand grasped the sleeve of the boy. She had caught him at last.

The captain saw it, and giving the signal, the rest of the line ran up the beach, the half-dozen who were furthest out, tumbling pell mell over each other, as the wave broke and carried them up the sand.

As soon as she felt that they were safe against being carried back by the undertow, Little Rifle knelt over the form of Harry, and raising his head upon her knee, looked longingly down on his face to see whether life had departed or not. It was hard for her to tell, but while gazing, the bluff Captain Cole stooped over her shoulder and put his hand upon his forehead and then upon his chest.

"Oh! he's all right," he said; "considerably bruised and half-choked, but don't you see he's breathing?"

"You think, then, he will not die?" she said, just raising her voice loud enough to be heard in the tumult.

"He's worth ten thousand dead boys; he'll come around all right in a few minutes; but we must get up a fire some way or other or we shall all perish. Dobbins must have got a crack on his head, some way or other, for he's dead as a door-nail. Well, you watch him while I see what can be done about starting a fire."

By dint of great effort, sufficient fuel was gathered, and a strong fire was kindled, around which the miserable shipwrecked sufferers gathered, and managed to keep themselves from perishing.

No Indians were to be seen, and, as the high cliffs shut out the view inland, they had strong hopes of escaping this danger.

It was found that two of the seamen had suffered such injuries, that, in spite of all that could be done, they succumbed and died. Wet, cold and hungry, the others could not have been much more miserable than they already were.

The storm rapidly abated, the sun coming out toward noon, and, as they caught sight of a sail in the distance, every thing was done to attract their notice. Captain Cole and a couple of his sailors ascended the cliffs and displayed signals of distress.

Fortunately these attempts succeeded, and about the middle of the afternoon, the ship came in as close to shore as was prudent, and a boat was sent in to bring the shipwrecked crew and passengers off.

The sea was still running very high, but by good seamanship, the task was accomplished without any mishap. The two dead bodies were also brought off, and given a burial from the ship.

On the clear, starry night that succeeded the tempestuous one, Harry Northend and Hagar Ravenna, better known as Little Rifle, sat by themselves, conversing over the past and speculating as to the future.

Her hand was imprisoned in his, and she no longer attempted to conceal the love that warmed her heart.

They first conversed of the past, and she made her story full and complete.

On that night when the two encamped in the Oregon wilderness, she had not the remotest intention of leaving him in the manner that she did.

But while he slept, the revelation that had been made to her during the preceding few hours drove all slumber from her eyelids. It so wrought upon her finally that she was obliged to rise to her feet, and pace back and forth in the gloom, as a man will do when crushed by some overwhelming calamity.

And then, fearful of awakening him, she wandered away in the gloom, expecting to return when she was able to master her emotions.

She wept and cried, and was almost beside herself, until she flung herself upon the ground, and prayed God to prevent her reason deserting her.

While lying thus in the gloom of the forest, she felt the distinct shock of an earthquake, and springing to her feet, was sensible of the ground swaying beneath. This new terror caused her to fall senseless to the ground.

When she regained her consciousness she was in a canoe, speeding swiftly down-stream, and in the dim light of the early dawn, she recognized the chief Maquesa, who, in answer

to her questions, told her that he was taking her to her father.

All that he said corresponded with what she had learned the previous day, and sad as she felt at the manner that she had left her dear friend, she could not refuse to go with him.

She gave the particulars of their journey through the woods and mountains, saying that never until she caught sight of Harry upon the wrecked Albatross did she know of a certainty that he was pursuing her.

It was plain now that when Robsart referred to the manner of her departure, he was convinced that she had temporarily lost her reason—but he forbore saying so, through fear of needlessly distressing her.

The meeting between father and daughter was singular and pathetic, and it was a sad, strange story that he told.

Jared Ravenna was one of the early pioneers of California, and in the year 1846 visited Astoria, where he met Maquesa, the Blackfoot chief, one day while hunting. A curious concurrence of circumstances caused a strong friendship to spring up between the two. He roamed the woods for weeks and months with him, and might have remained for years; but the discovery of gold in California, caused him, with hundreds of others, to hurry thither.

Good fortune attended him in the mines, and leaving there he went east, married the love of his youth, and returned again to California; but the rugged life he was compelled to lead was too much for his wife, who died at the birth of Hagar.

California at that time was infested with the scum of the earth, and not knowing what to do with the infant, he thought of his old friend Maquesa, and sailing to Astoria, placed her in charge of the chief, who agreed to give her the best care until she should reach a suitable age to be taken on the long journey eastward, to receive proper attention and education.

A whim led the father to purchase the little rifle of a miner, and to leave that with her, to provide against a contingency which he hoped would never occur.

It was the intention of Mr. Ravenna to return and claim his child at the end of two years, he agreeing to pay the chief a handsome sum for the care she was to receive in the interval at the hands of his squaw, himself and people.

(Only moderate fortune attending Mr. Ravenna's second venture in the mines, he entered into a speculation somewhat of a different and somewhat of the same character. Receiving what they deemed reliable information of the existence of gold on an almost unknown portion of the African coast, a party was formed to go thither.

When near their destination their vessel was wrecked, and those of their company who were not lost fell into the hands of the savages. A half dozen were kept in confinement for nearly ten years, when three of them succeeded one dark night in swimming off to a slaver, and by a roundabout and wearisome route the despairing father at last found his way back to California, where to his amazement he discovered himself wealthy from the appreciation of a large quantity of land to which he possessed a clear title.

But he cared nothing for this. His child was his whole thought, and without an hour's unnecessary delay he reached Astoria, where he found not a soul recognized him, so great had been the personal change in his appearance during his long years of absence.

With the assistance of a couple of Indians he had little difficulty in reaching Maquesa, who had long since given him up as dead. The chief undoubtedly suspected the identity of Little Rifle, but cared not to interfere between her and Old Ruff Robsart, so long as he believed her parent would not return to claim her.

So much of the Past.

And now of the Present.

Mr. Ravenna was devotedly attached to his child, who was rapidly learning to return his love. During his absence San Francisco had become a great and growing city, and he proposed to settle down there and devote himself to the education and welfare of his daughter. He received Harry as his own child, and made him promise to make his home with him until his own father should come to claim him.

And the future, who should penetrate that?

A couple of months later Mr. Northend appeared in San Francisco, in company with Old Ruff Robsart, who was almost as wild with delight to meet his own Little Rifle again as she was to see him. He already noted a rapid improvement in

her manner and appearance, and he was sure she was going to make the handsomest woman that ever lived. He said, in course of their many conversations, that one reason he returned to the wilds of Oregon was to visit the cavern, in which it will be remembered Harry and Little Rifle had become lost, after the former had gone over the falls. He expected to find gold there, and so he did, but in too insignificant quantities to compensate him, and so he left in disgust.

Five years later, the prosperous merchant, Harry Northend, received his Bride of the Wilderness, as he still fondly termed her, and wishing them all happiness we bid them farewell.

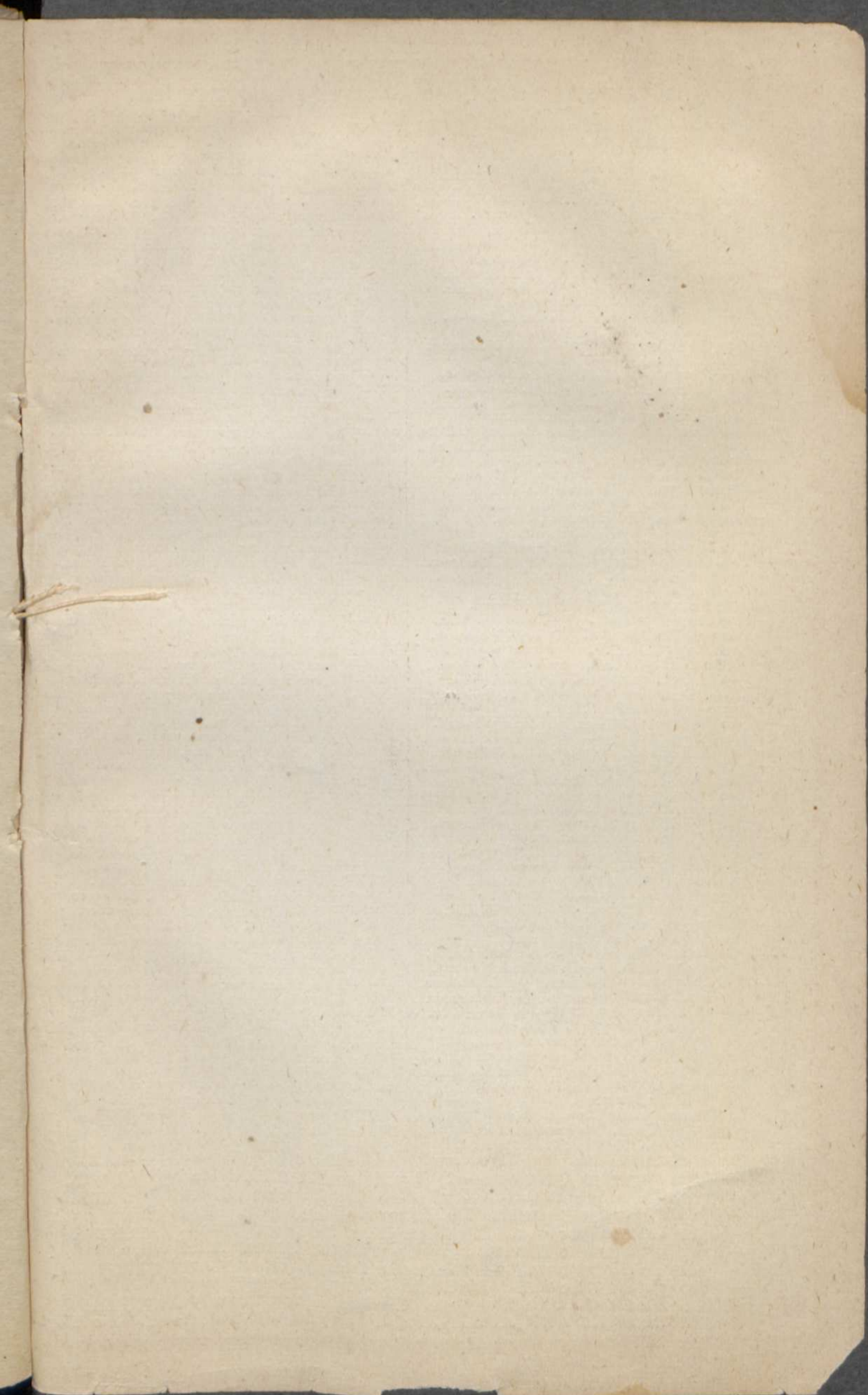
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